

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 26 : Number Three ; Fall 2005

The Value of Guilt

Blocks to Christian Maturity

Lifelong Development to Christian Maturity

Education and Christian Maturity

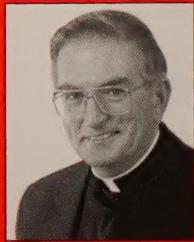
Wisdom's Threefold Path

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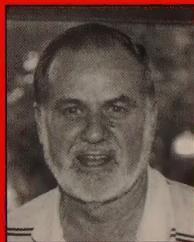
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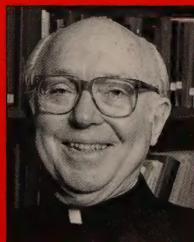
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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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Editor's Page

CHRISTIAN MATURITY

The First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium took place June 3-4, 2005, at Regis University with about ninety participants, most from Colorado. The weather was, by exception for Denver, not cooperative, but it did not dampen the enthusiasm of those attending and making presentations. The theme of this conference was "Christian Maturity," a theme dear to the heart of the man in whose memory and honor the Symposium was held. Jim's sister and brother-in-law, Mary and Daniel Jennings, were present, and Dan gave a moving tribute to Jim. Present also were other long-time friends and supporters of Jim's many creative endeavors to help the people of God grow toward the maturity God desires for them. In this issue we are privileged to present the keynote addresses by Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T., and Father Michael J. Sheeran, S.J., as well as three of the four workshop presentations scheduled for the Symposium. My own presentation appeared in the summer 2005 issue. I hope that you enjoy them as much as did the participants of the Symposium.

What is Christian maturity? You will have a chance to read a number of answers to that question in this issue. As I began pondering this Editor's Page, I was directing some people on an eight-day retreat. The Gospel readings for the week were taken from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. It occurred to me that this sermon distills Jesus' answer to the question. But it might help to grasp the truth of this insight if I put the sermon in some context.

More than likely Jesus never gave the whole Sermon on the Mount at one time. He was an itinerant preacher who went around the small villages of Galilee with the urgent message that the long-desired Kingdom of God was, with his ministry, coming into the world. He proclaimed this message by word and deed. The people of Israel, who had been chosen by God to be the light of the world, were now being challenged to live out that calling by following Jesus. In

these villages his primary audiences were peasants and laborers like himself. It was, in other words, to ordinary people like you and me that he spoke. Fishermen, tax collectors, farmers, widows, mothers and fathers, these were the people whom he called to be what the people of Israel were meant to be, the light of the world, the salt of the earth (Mt 13:16). These people heard him say that the poor, the meek, the mourners, the merciful, the peacemakers were blessed (Mt 5: 2-10).

As he traveled from village to village, some people began to follow him. To them he gave instructions on how they were to behave in order to be light to the world. These instructions were not new; they were part of God's challenge to the chosen people from the beginning, but Jesus took them radically. "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder,' and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment..." (Mt 5: 21-22). "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart..." (Mt 5: 27-28). "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous....Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 43-48). In addition to these injunctions on how they were to act Jesus gave them a prayer, the one we call the Our Father. Jesus' followers were not distinguished by their ascetic lifestyle ("Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" [Mk 2: 18]), but by their forgiveness, their kindness, their integrity as human beings. In this Sermon on the Mount Jesus delineates what it means to be a mature human being.

Notice that the model Jesus proposes is God, who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” We are to be perfect as God is perfect. At this point we may be tempted to throw up our hands in despair or to look for an exit. But let us stay with the notion of God as model for a while. In Genesis we are told: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1: 27). Thus, right from the beginning of the bible the chosen people are told that the model God uses in creating human beings is Godself. Human beings are told to be fruitful and to multiply and to be God’s stewards of the planet they have been given as their habitat. They are to work together with God to make the planet a place where men and women can live in harmony and peace with one another and with the whole of creation. In other words, human beings are to live in this world the way God would live in it if God were to be a human being. This is the religious maturity God wants human beings to grow into.

Now, in fact, we did not and do not live this way. We “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3: 23). The consequences of our failure to live as images of God plague the human race and the planet. War, endemic poverty, environmental devastation are among those consequences.

We may be tempted to retort that we were given an impossible task, to live in this world as God would live in it. “We are only human, prone to weakness and sin. How can we be expected to live as God?” Well, Christian faith says that it has been done. Jesus of Nazareth, a real human being in no way different from the rest of his fellow human beings except in the matter of sin, did live as God wants us all to live. It is possible because it has been done. Moreover, people have lived in imitation of Jesus. An old maxim of logic argues from existence to possibility (“*ab esse ad posse*”). We have models who have been able to live as the human beings God desires in creation. Therefore, it is possible for us.

Jesus believed that it was possible for his listeners,

the ordinary people he met as he wandered around Galilee in the first century of our era. And, apparently, some of them thought it was possible and even attractive to try, with God’s grace, to live this way. These were his followers. And these followers a few years after his death and resurrection began to be called “Christians.” To be a Christian is to believe that it is possible to live in imitation of Jesus; it is to believe that what God wants God also makes possible. But we have to grow into this kind of maturity, the maturity that enables us to forgive those who injure us, to reach out the hand of friendship to those who are different and strange to us, to go the extra mile, turn the other cheek. We can become mature Christians if we want to, but it will only come by associating with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with other Christians in a community of prayer and of service. We become like Jesus by spending time with him, by coming to know him intimately and thus to love him. We become like those we love. The path to Christian maturity is Jesus, “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14: 6). I hope that the articles in this issue will foster our growth into mature Christians.

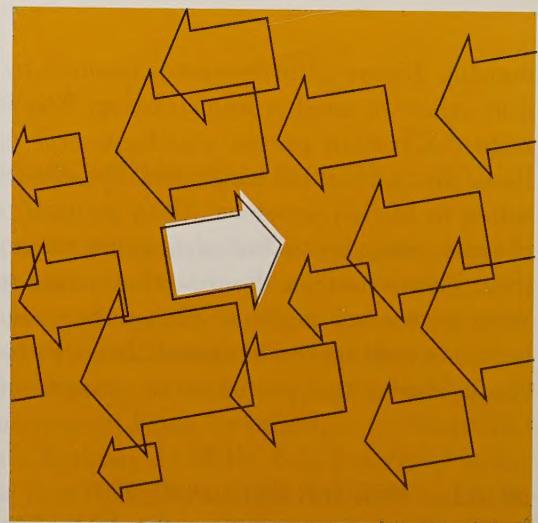
Before I close I want to alert readers to the Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium to be held at Regis University. Please visit our website for details (www.regis.edu/hd). The theme for that Symposium will be “Spirituality and Healthy Living.” We have engaged Kenneth Pargament, Ph.D., of Bowling Green University, one of America’s leaders in the field of psychology and religion, to be the keynote speaker. We plan to have a number of workshops that will explore the theme as well. It should be an informative and inspirational meeting, building on the success of the First Symposium, some of whose fruits you can taste in the pages to come. Perhaps I will see many of you at that next Symposium.



William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

Developing Christian Maturity in Our Pluralistic Society

Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.



The following article is based on a talk given at the First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver, CO, June 3-4, 2005. – The Editor.

Christian maturity is not a list of objective qualities that can be lifted from a book and applied to oneself. Christian maturity is a journey, a personal, daily, unique and satisfying but disciplined journey. The goal of the journey is to move closer to becoming everything God has created one to be. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a document called *To Be a Christian Steward*, commenting on stewardship, reminded us of the individual and personal dimension of this journey: “Jesus does not call us as nameless people in a faceless crowd. He calls us individually by name.”

The ideal way to begin any journey is with a guide, someone who has traversed the terrain before and can direct you. Guides in the journey toward Christian maturity lead more by their actions and witness than by their words. Pope Paul VI stated, “People don’t listen to teachers (or guides). They listen to witnesses and when they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*).

To comprehend what Christian maturity looks like I would suggest that you eschew using articles or books as the roadmap. Rather, the journey toward understanding Christian maturity begins in rela-

"Preach the gospel...use words if you have to."

tionship. Discover the essence of maturity by observing it incarnate in another human being. Who is the most mature Christian person you have ever encountered? Bring that person into your mind. Spend a few minutes sitting in his/her presence. Allow yourself not only to observe that person but also to encounter him/her truly. How would you describe that person to another? What are his/her qualities? What is there about his/her behavior and approach toward that life that inclined you to choose that person as an example of a mature Christian?

JIM GILL — MENTOR IN CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Just as I invited you to enter into that process, so I did the same. I reflected on an individual who mentored me in Christian maturity. I reflected on Jim Gill. He was probably the most mature person I have ever encountered.

The first time I met Jim I was a director of formation in my congregation. I asked Jim what he would do if he were in charge of forming people for ministry. He immediately responded, "First, I wouldn't presume I had to teach them how to pray." He explained that people would not be in such a program if they did not already have a personal relationship with their God. What he recommended, I would learn over the years, was characteristic of how he approached people. He would ask them to tell him about their prayer life and then help them to build on what was already there. The second recommendation he made was, "I would help them to learn how to fail." At the time I thought this sounded like heresy. After all, weren't we supposed to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect?

Gradually, I came to realize the wisdom of Jim's advice. Mature people have a spirituality of failure and find God in both successes and failures. The mature

person is able to embrace failure and discover God present in the failure. Maturity is not equated with perfection. Rather, maturity implies a decision to remain committed to the journey, even when one experiences failure. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a document entitled, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, reminds us that every Christian has four calls: to holiness, to community, to ministry and mission, and to Christian maturity. God calls us to Christian maturity. In describing the mature Christian the bishops quote Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "We are not called to success: we are called to faithfulness."

Mature Christians are not perfect but rather persist on the journey even when it is difficult and challenging. One of the things I heard Jim playfully repeat often is, "Always leave room for improvement," knowing the mature person is forever on the journey.

FOUR QUALITIES IN MATURE CHRISTIANS

As I reflect on some of the qualities and attributes that I witnessed in Jim Gill, they begin to form a collage of what a mature Christian looks like. I will identify four key qualities of mature Christians:

Mature Christians are primarily generative, other-centered individuals who are constantly identifying the gifts that God has given them and discerning where and how God is calling them to use those gifts for others.

Compassion is the most evident characteristic of mature Christians. Compassion, according to Webster's dictionary, is a spiritual response. It involves more than feeling and thinking. It involves action flowing from a deep personal relationship with the Lord. Compassionate individuals sensitize themselves to the pain and suffering in others and, because of their relationship with God, respond to those needs in very personal and concrete ways.

Mature Christians are people of integrity, who always choose to do the right thing, regardless of the consequences. They are courageous people of faith who are compelled, like St. Paul, to preach and live the Gospel. As Saint Francis of Assisi proclaimed, "Preach the gospel...use words if you have to." Their actions constitute their preaching.

Mature people live life to the full. They are dynamic, rather than static. Christians are never called to survival. Christ calls everyone to the fullness of life: "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." Mature Christians exude life, joy and hope. They

are not the burned-out, depressed people that we sometimes encounter. Rather, they are individuals who are comfortable with themselves and with the broad range of human emotions that they experience. Christian maturity is not a distinct quality; rather it integrates the sacred and the spiritual into every dimension of life.

GENERATIVITY

From the first day that I met Jim until the final workshop that I was privileged to conduct with him, I was struck by his intense desire to help people to grow to the fullness of their capacity, to be the mature, generative people that God created them to be. He compassionately accepted everyone as they were. However, he consistently and lovingly prodded them to the next step in their developmental journey toward fuller maturity. He continually focused on their need to become more other-centered, generative people. He advised people to think developmentally. He was concerned that individuals might expect themselves to be mature, generative people without having taken adequate time to work through the previous, normal stages of development. If they attempted to act generatively before they had become truly generative, they were condemned to frustration, failure and maybe even withdrawal from active ministry.

A member of the General Council of a religious congregation recently said that most of his personnel problems were the result of dealing with individuals who were underdeveloped; that is, these people were not grown to their potential as human beings. Jim's passion for fostering human development was so ingrained in him that when he decided to initiate a new magazine his choice for its title was a simple decision. He called it **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**.

But Jim did not just write and lecture about human development and generativity. He was generative. He always put the needs of others above his own needs, but not in a way that depleted him or produced burnout. Rather, as with true generativity, it energized him. He would make himself completely available when a bishop or a major superior would refer someone who was in pain. An archbishop who had frequently consulted with Jim recently said to me, "There was no end to his energy and his zeal." One of the major characteristics of truly generative people is that they are zealous. They are "energizer bunnies."

The guru can see a butterfly in a caterpillar, the eagle in an egg, the saint in a selfish person.

TRANSMITTING ONE'S WISDOM, SKILLS TO OTHERS

Perhaps the greatest indication of generativity is the willingness to invest oneself in transmitting one's personal wisdom and skills to others. I was the beneficiary of that aspect of Jim's generativity. He was willing to be a mentor to me, to teach me what he had learned through his years of being for others.

The late Anthony de Mello, S.J., a spiritual leader and author from India, described this aspect of mentoring when he told the story of a guru who described what it means to be a guru. He summarized it as the ability to see. The guru can see a butterfly in a caterpillar, the eagle in an egg, the saint in a selfish person. A mentor's chief characteristic is to be able to see the latent gifts in another and create a climate so those gifts can blossom.

GENERATIVITY IS ABOUT BEING

Too often generativity is equated exclusively with doing. Generativity is about being as well as doing. This was most evident as Jim prepared for his own death. He spent months unable to do his usual packed schedule. He spent those last months in a prolonged retreat, deepening his personal relationship with the Lord. Just the day before he died he called and said, "Lock, I'm going to heaven today." I asked him if he was ready, and he said yes. I told him I would pray with him as he made his final preparation to meet his God.

Maturity shows itself most profoundly in the process of dying and diminishment when one does not have the capacity "to do." Jim's understanding of how individuals must be valued for more than what they do

The ultimate criterion of integrity is how one lives one's final months and years.

was evident in one of the first published interviews with him. The interview was entitled, "Despondency: Why We See It In Priests." It appeared in the December 1969 issue of a medical journal, *Medical Insight*. In the article Jim wisely observed that priests are frequently affirmed only for what they do. As a result, they respond by doing more of the tasks for which they are affirmed, frequently resulting in despondent, workaholic priests.

Jim concluded that priests needed to be affirmed for who they are, not just for what they do. Jim applied that learning to his relationships with all, not just priests. He could discern the good in people and would affirm them frequently for who they were, not just for what they did.

GIFT OF A LISTENING PRESENCE

The major characteristic of generative people is that they develop the gift of a listening presence. Jim was the penultimate listener. He was completely present to anyone who engaged him in discussion. People left an encounter with Jim feeling affirmed and special. He listened intently with his heart and soul as well as with his mind and ears.

As a result, he could read the hearts of individuals, revealing even those aspects that were hidden to them.

COMPASSION

There are many wise men and women who work in the church. More important than wisdom, however, is compassion. St. Theresa of Avila said there is only one true crucible for testing prayer, and that is compassion. The gospel of Mark seems to sum up the life of Jesus when it says, "he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them" (Mk 6:34).

Jim was truly Christ-like because he was compassionate. Compassion was a hallmark of Jim's life. He

had an innate ability to penetrate beyond the surface to the very heart of people. People constantly searched him out because of this unique gift of compassion that he possessed to an extraordinary degree.

In conducting workshops on ministry I frequently ask people to share their experience of ministry. I ask them to reflect on a specific time when they were on the receiving end of ministry. Inevitably, they describe a situation when they were in pain and crisis and someone responded to them with compassion. Compassion is the linchpin where spirituality and ministry meet.

When I interviewed a number of people who had been identified by their colleagues as people who reflected Christ in the workplace, it was startling to hear how many of them described their major virtue as compassion. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT's Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, who worked closely with Jim for many years, shared a story that epitomizes Jim's compassion. A young Jesuit priest anointed Jim as he lay in a semi-conscious state. Jim woke up just as the anointing was ended, looked directly into the eyes of the young priest and said, "Mike, thank you. How nice to see you. Tell me, how are your studies going?" Jim was an other-centered person of compassion right to the end. He preached primarily by his actions.

INTEGRITY

A few years ago, as mentioned, I interviewed forty-two individuals whom others could clearly identify as mature Christians in the workplace. When I asked these individuals what values influenced the way they led their lives, the responses were consistent. The first ten I interviewed, living in six different states in the United States, indicated that they had to do the "right thing" regardless of the consequences. In other words, what distinguished each of these mature Christians was their integrity.

Integrity, Jim taught me, was about looking back on one's life with a discerning heart and reaching the conclusion that you had done the best you could with the grace and knowledge you had at the time. The person of integrity is consoled by the realization that faithfulness, not perfection, is the goal, as Saint Paul taught. It does not matter whether or not one wins the race but simply that one persevered in running the race (cf. 2 Timothy 4: 7).

The ultimate criterion of integrity is how one lives one's final months and years. The mature Christian is one who continues to radiate peace, hope and joy even

in the midst of diminishment. Anyone who had the opportunity to visit with Jim during his last months was privy to a tangible model of how the mature Christian not only lives but how he/she dies. Writer Mitch Albom captured the essence of this integrity as he chronicled the last months of the life of his mentor in the absorbing book, *Tuesdays With Morrie*. Albom described how he spent one day a week visiting a loved teacher and mentor to glean the final wisdom as Morrie journeyed toward his death. Those who had the opportunity to visit Jim during his final illness were graced to have their own "Morrie." Jim witnessed what the integrity that he taught looked like incarnated in his unique person.

LIFE-FILLED AND LIFE-GIVING

Jim lived life to the full. The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus called all its members to affective maturation, which included "an educated sensibility for the humane achievements of life that are found in the arts, literature, music, and so forth" (Decree 8, nn. 259-260). Jim was truly a renaissance man. His interests included not only philosophy and theology, the arts, music and literature, but also expanded to medicine, psychiatry, the sciences and to history as well. He was continually reading and deepening his knowledge because he believed that in doing so he increased his potential to minister more effectively.

When Jim realized he was coming toward the end of his life, he invited a few of us to help him divest himself of his most prized possessions, his books. When we finished packing the books, we had more than a hundred boxes scattered in all corners of his office. As he fingered each of the books before packing them, he recalled what he had learned from each of the authors. Packing those books gave a glimpse of how far-reaching Jim's interests were. There were books on every imaginable topic. Mature people do not limit their interests. They thirst for knowledge.

Jim was not only life-filled, but as is true of all mature people, he exuded life. He was convinced that each day was a special gift from God, and he lived each day with joy and enthusiasm. There was a contagion of life and energy that you experienced when you were with him.

EMBRACING LIFE WITH ALL ITS COMPLEXITIES

People who are filled with life are never one-dimensional people, looking for simple solutions. They

Jim was convinced that each day was a special gift from God, and he lived each day with joy and enthusiasm.

embrace life with all its complexities. Their interests are broad, some constant and some ever-changing. They are open to people and ideas without any premature closure or biases.

Jim was a man in motion. He was unable or unwilling to sink into a safe comfort zone. He volunteered his time and gifts to a variety of projects that he knew would benefit from his experience and wisdom. Examples of these ventures were the San Francisco study of Type A personalities and the Recurrent Coronary (heart attack) Prevention Project and a Blood Donor Motivation Study at the American Association of Blood Banks in Washington, D.C. He worked collaboratively with others who sought his advice and wisdom, serving the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Priestly Life and Ministry and the special committee studying the issue of sexual abuse. He continually searched for new ways to share his wisdom and transform the lives of people. It was his deep faith that provided the incentive to initiate new projects like HUMAN DEVELOPMENT magazine and the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality. He was convinced that God was calling him to initiate these new ventures, and so he acted, unconcerned about whether they would succeed or fail. In following what he discerned to be God's will he was being faithful and life giving.

A DEEP PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Jim's fullness of life emanated from the deep personal relationship he had with his God. This was evident to anyone who truly knew Jim. Like Saint Paul, Jim felt compelled by God to do what he did. He was truly God-centered. Jim's love of the Eucharist was extraordinary. Anyone who had the opportunity to know Jim well can attest to the fact that during crisis

“....Jim Gill did things that no other person on the face of the earth could have done at that time....He was magic....”

times Jim’s first impulse was to turn to God in prayer for wisdom and fortitude.

The Mission Statement of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT underscores Jim’s conviction about the need to be filled with life; it states that its goal is to help people become reflections of God, “human persons fully alive.” Mature, life-filled and life-giving people are comfortable with a wide range of emotions. They are people who can laugh and cry with us. They can allow themselves to experience all their emotions, the painful ones as well as the pleasant ones. They can accept their anger as well as their joy and fear.

The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, in its document on the vow of chastity, states that affective maturity means, in the first place, to be in touch with, to develop and to integrate all of one’s emotions. The document challenges Jesuits to grow in their personal maturity and their capacity to love, which results in an individual who is “warmly human.” The Jesuits even provide the criterion by which one

can evaluate his growth in this area: it is the deep happiness he experiences in living a life of personal love and service.

CONCLUSION

I recently met a Jesuit who knew of my association and friendship with Jim. He said, “Jim was a grace. Jim Gill did things that no other person on the face of the earth could have done at that time....He was magic....He was the right man in the right place.” What a beautiful and apt testament from a confrere. That statement summarizes the life of Jim Gill for me.

I began this presentation by describing Christian maturity as a journey. I encouraged you to search for a witness, a mentor, who witnessed for you what a mature Christian looks like. For me, Jim Gill was the epitome and model of Christian maturity.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Wisdom's Threefold Path to Christian Maturity

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

The following article is based on a talk given at the First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver, CO, June 3-4, 2005. – The Editor.

In keeping with Father James Gill's thrust toward fullness of life and our search for Christian maturity, I wish to outline a three-fold wisdom path that may foster our growth toward that maturity and fullness. Wisdom often is perceived as the crowning achievement of a life that has been lived deeply and well. Yet wisdom is a rather elusive concept because it is presented in many different forms in our Scriptures as well as in the writings of sages, whose times and cultures are far different from our own.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we find Lady Wisdom, the mysterious woman who appears in the First Testament and whose subtle influence is found in the person of Jesus and in many Second Testament writings. The gift of wisdom, which we traditionally think of as given at Confirmation, is considered to be the highest gift of the Spirit, a gift that is a sharing in God's life that helps us make right judgments, even in ordinary and practical matters, and orients us to do God's will in all things. Psychology also has studied wisdom and the ways in which we become wise and has some insights to offer as we move along these three paths.



Our search for wisdom also leads us to confront negative stereotypes and negative self-image, especially as they pertain to aging.

Although wisdom often is seen as a prerogative of elders, age alone is not an automatic guarantee of wisdom. The potential for growth in wisdom is rooted in our early life experiences and requires nurturing and tending over the years as we apply ourselves to the developmental tasks appropriate to each stage of life. Psychologists Andrew Achenbaum and Lucinda Orwell identified a number of elements of wisdom that can be grouped into a threefold path that leads to our formation as wise persons. This path might be described as an intertwining of the sub-paths of intrapersonal growth or self-development, growth in interpersonal relatedness and, finally, growth that is transpersonal, that is, growth that takes us beyond the limits of our particular egos.

Each of the paths requires emotional and cognitive growth and growth in our ability to integrate our desires, values and behavior. And, when infused with a faith dimension, this threefold path has the potential to bring us to Christian maturity, the fullness of life that is Jesus' promise and God's glory.

THE PATH OF INTRAPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF

Looking first at the path of intrapersonal development, we find that as we progress through life, we must do the work of mourning the life stage (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, etc.) that we have left behind in order to grow into our next phase of life. Of course, in our younger years we seldom paid much attention to the work of mourning because it tended to be overshadowed by our joy in achieving developmental milestones that offered us greater freedom, independence, excitement or whatever it was we desired.

A difference occurs at midlife, however, when we are obliged to mourn our youth and face the first of our gray hairs, along with the fact that certain of our

dreams are unlikely to come to fruition. As we continue to age, we then need to mourn midlife — and face the fact that we are now senior citizens, that our physical health can no longer be taken for granted. Perhaps we need to mourn loss of social status as we retire from positions that have served to define us and, above all, we need to face our own mortality — and mourn for the fact that the bulk of our life already has been lived.

No matter at what stage of life we find ourselves, we must guard against remaining in this state of mourning, and so another of our tasks is that of moving on. This means doing our grief work and learning to love again. These tasks require that we develop emotional flexibility, a trait that enables us to adapt to changes that affect and, to some extent, constitute, our new self: a new residence, new school, new work, new friends and new family — not only one's in-laws but also each new child that comes to birth. In later years, our emotional flexibility will help us weather the storms of loss of friends, work and family by encouraging us to develop wider networks and maintain a variety of interactions with persons of all ages, thus avoiding emotional impoverishment.

Our search for wisdom also leads us to confront negative stereotypes and negative self-image, especially as they pertain to aging. Although there are certainly negative stereotypes of adolescents that need to be overcome, it is the stereotypes of aging that tend to render people, particularly women, invisible. One bit of wisdom that might help us in this area is assessing the values and the standards by which we judge ourselves. If the standards and the values are the same as those applied to persons in the prime of life, no wonder elders feel like failures. One simply cannot compete in terms of physical strength, swiftness or short-term memory skills. Once again we are asked to revisit the tensions that exist between our sense of autonomy and feelings of shame and doubt. The wisdom path would suggest that we learn to live gracefully with our physical limitations, neither consigning ourselves to a premature state of immobility and decline nor adopting a stance of pseudo-independence that serves only to mask our real needs.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF

Listening to the wisdom of our bodies reminds us that we may need to investigate our family trees in order to determine what our familial assets and risk

factors might be. Fortunately, for us, there are many opportunities to educate ourselves about our physical health and our medical needs. There is a wealth of information available in books and on the Internet, but it is up to us to convert this information into knowledge by taking the time to acquaint ourselves with the areas most likely to affect us.

Another area of knowledge near and dear to Father James Gill's heart was the knowing of our sexual selves. This exploration begins far earlier than some of us might have assumed for even in infancy children engage in exploratory activity. Heightened sexual awareness and exploration occur during adolescence and young adulthood as we become acquainted with and define our sexual selves. But, oddly enough, for many years society was content to deny the sexuality of the elder person. It was as if sexual love was the province of the young, while middle-aged persons and elders were regarded as some sort of "neuter gender." That stereotype is undergoing rapid change these days. The graying of the Baby Boomers — for whom nothing is impossible — and the introduction of drugs which increase sexual potency have changed the picture of elder adult sexuality from sepia-toned and shades of gray to living Technicolor. The phrase from the old wedding service, "with my body I thee worship" is lived most fully and poignantly not when the body is flush with the beauty of youth but when it is seasoned with the lines and the scars of a lifetime.

WISDOM OF THE GIFT OF TOUCH

I especially recommend developing the wisdom of the gift of touch because it is such an important means of communicating with others. From infancy onward we respond to the touch of those caring for us — in fact, not to be touched in a loving way during infancy leads to failure to thrive. Think of the healing touch of Jesus — in almost every healing story in the gospel it is recorded that he touched the person. The power of touch is attested to in our sacramental life as well. At various points in our lives, beginning with our Baptism, we are anointed with oil, and during the rites for Confirmation and Holy Orders have the hands of the priest/bishop laid on us. Those marrying are instructed to make their vows while holding each other's hands. And when we are ill, nothing helps quite so much as the gentle touch of hands reaching out to

Our efforts to integrate our stated values and express them in behavioral terms lead us to develop a high level of integrity.

us, sharing our pain, sometimes easing our transition from this world to the next.

Our efforts to arrive at Christian maturity, to become wise, are not limited to knowledge of the physical body, however. It is also important, essential even, that we seek self-knowledge in the psychological realm. Throughout our lives we need to revisit our identity issues lest we lose ourselves in confusion, not knowing who we are.

One of the aspects of self-knowledge that we approach as we traverse this wisdom path is knowledge of our souls. Obtaining this knowledge invites us to move far beyond ordinary self-inspection. Gregory of Nyssa reminds us that we are copies of the Being who is incorruptible Beauty and reflections of the true Light into whom we are transformed and whose brightness shines in us. In gazing at and appreciating the beauty of our souls, he reminds us, we behold in them the Pattern or Archetype — the God image. And Saint Paul, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, says "all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

SELF-INTEGRATION

Our efforts to integrate our stated values and express them in behavioral terms lead us to develop a high level of integrity. We might think of integrity as inner psychological harmony or wholeness in which we hold the tension of the opposites so that our behavior is based not so much on "either/or" thinking but on "both/and." Striving for this level of integrity asks that we do the difficult work of confronting our shadow side

The wisdom path of our interpersonal relationships is characterized by the development of empathic understanding.

and come to accept it along with the bright. In essence, we arrive at a state of humility, giving up our pride in a false sense of goodness, recognizing the darkness that has been and always will be a part of our nature.

A second way of considering our integrity is in our willingness to align personal expression with psychological reality. In other words, we bring our inner and outer selves into accord with each other; we are honest, first of all with ourselves, and with others. This facet of integrity sometimes goes by the name congruence or authenticity. We mature to the point where we are able to live beyond the level of shoulds or oughts and act from choices that we personally affirm. Living at this level of integrity invites us to remove the masks we use to hide our true selves from ourselves and from others. You can sometimes catch a glimpse of someone living at this level of integrity when you hear of persons who left lucrative careers in order to follow their hearts' desires — even if the pay is less. On the moral level one may also see this form of integrity at work when persons come to hold value systems that place them at odds with their family and neighbors. The experience of a religious conversion or breaking with the majority view and tossing in one's lot with an oppressed minority may serve as examples.

JUDGING BEHAVIOR FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ETERNITY

A third facet of integrity might be conceived of as wholeness and conformity in time. Persons who develop this sort of integrity tend to take a long view, judging their own behavior from the standpoint of eternity, rather than being swayed by the desire for immediate gratification that could lead to their focusing on pleasure or material success. We honor this sort of integrity whenever we celebrate wedding anniversaries or anniversaries of priesthood and religious profession.

We also see this sort of integrity lived out by those who dedicate their lives to some particular type of service over a number of years. While we might be tempted to view this type of integrity as the province of those in professional occupations, many people in humbler jobs also live out this aspect of integrity. It is less a matter of what type of work you do; it is how consistently well the job is performed with love and caring that makes for integrity.

Achieving Christian maturity is never merely an individual accomplishment; it is a social accomplishment as well. From birth and from our baptisms we are received into a matrix of relationships and community: the community of our family and the community of the Body of Christ. Our ability to form and maintain a coherent sense of self over the course of a lifetime involves a complex interaction between our interpersonal environments and ourselves.

The wisdom path of our interpersonal relationships is characterized by the development of empathic understanding. From the emotional perspective, this means we develop sensitivity to the emotional needs of others and compassion. From the cognitive perspective, we strive to become perceptive, intuitive persons able to enter into another's world of experience. To attain relational wisdom we are encouraged to learn the arts of looking and listening, as these are the ways through which we befriend each other and establish ties. This piece of wisdom invites us to develop our patience and inner calm so that we may see clearly and listen attentively, a far cry from the incessant chatter people engage in on their cell phones. What is needed is a contemplative way of looking and listening so that we are able to savor the complexity of the other person's life.

Learning to be selflessly present to another requires that we develop sufficient maturity to set aside our ego-dominated needs and accept others as equal to ourselves in importance. Selfless presence also demands that we resist the temptation to cast the other person in our own image and likeness and wait to see the unique image of God that he or she is emerge. We might think of ourselves assuming the roles of mentor and mid-wife. We may have done some of this work in terms of our occupational fields, where we take students or interns and do our best to impart the wisdom and the technical knowledge learned through our job experience.

Wisdom's Threefold Path to Christian Maturity

	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Transpersonal
Path of Feeling <i>Emotion, Affectivity</i>	Growing Self Mourning Stereotypes New Self	Empathy Self-less Presence Mentor Role Non-Possessive Love Pathway to Prayer	Transcending Self Grand-Generativity Kinship Care of Earth Mortality Creativity Prayer of Union
Path of Knowledge <i>Cognitive Factors</i>	Knowing Self Body Wisdom Sexual Self Identity Issues Soul Knowledge	Understanding Infused Above	Recognizing Limits Impasse Existential Limits Mystery of Faith Suffering Wisdom of Cross Mystery of Death
Path of Integration <i>Desires, Values, Behavior</i>	Integrity Wholeness Congruence Time Dimension	Mature Relationships Acceptance of Others Partnership Creative Fidelity Merciful Forgiveness Gift of Love Relation with God	Commitments Power of Choice Responsibility Meaning Making Power to Summon Personal Mission Commitment Traps Personal Meaning

This chart is adapted from the work of Andrew Achenbaum, Ph.D., and Lucinda Orwoll, Ph.D. ("Becoming wise: a Psycho-gerontological Interpretation of the Book of Job," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 1991, 32 (1), 21-39; "Gender and the Development of Wisdom," *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 1993, (36), 274-296). The text is from the manuscript *Seasoned with Sage*, by Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D. All rights reserved.

Dedication to a life of prayer, however, serves to give us a sense of purpose and usefulness.

DEVELOPING NON-POSSESSIVE LOVE

These roles are especially appropriate as we mature, as it is one way of embodying the tasks of the stage of generativity and can be beneficial to both the mentor and the person being mentored. Although not sought as an end in itself, the psychological intimacy that is engendered in fulfilling the role of a mentor is highly rewarding. It is a privilege to be invited into the inner life of another person. As we offer others an environment of safety and warmth, we often find greater security and stability in ourselves. The bonds that attach us to them allow us to see them in new light and may reward us with a deepened sense of self-cohesion and ego functioning.

Growing to deeper wisdom in the interpersonal area calls for developing a form of love that is non-possessive, based on the acceptance of others in their own right, a non-evaluative, non-judgmental understanding of each person from his or her own frame of reference. The wisdom of non-possessive love asks that we learn to curb our tendencies to control the outcome of events and other persons' lives and, instead, honor their solitude and freedom. This sets the stage for genuine intimacy, as we are better able to avoid the twin traps of enmeshment and engulfment that make it difficult for the other to be his or her true self.

A lesson that most parents learn is that love can be expressed by letting go at the appropriate time rather than by holding too tightly and preventing the child from growing up. Non-possessive love of this sort invites us to a spiritual maturation and transformation, developing what the old spiritual masters called purity of heart. If we are faithful to the practice of self-observation, we will come to face reality, seeing life as it is and ourselves as we really are, not as we might wish we

were. Although we will have to struggle when faced with our self-centered activities and emotions, over time the process of transformation will occur, and we shall be freed internally to love beyond the limits of our needs.

WISDOM OF EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING

The wisdom of empathic understanding also makes a significant contribution to our life of prayer. Father Gill was a person who appreciated the prayerful aspect of empathic understanding. With Ignatius of Loyola he recommended that those praying make use of their imaginations to meet Jesus in the ordinary rounds of life and to ask for an intimate knowledge of him, experiencing his thoughts, feelings, intentions and motivations in such a way as to inspire love and gratitude. Father Gill was aware that we have varying capacities for empathy, but anticipated that by our making the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* over a period of years we could come to a profound comprehension of the experiences of Jesus. Sharing these experiences in such a way that feelings of gratitude, love and loyalty are enkindled would then nurture a life of active service for God's greater glory.

Clearly the level of our active service will change over the course of our lives. Dedication to a life of prayer, however, serves to give us a sense of purpose and usefulness. This especially can be helpful in our later years when our mobility is limited. Through the interconnectedness of intercessory prayer and compassionate action inspired by our love of God, we come to find ourselves increasingly drawn into the flow of love that unites us to God and each other, understanding anew the image of the vine and the branches.

MATURE RELATIONSHIPS

Seeking to integrate our ideals of empathic understanding with actual behavior, we come to examine the wisdom of mature relationships. As our relational capacity develops over time, we find ourselves moving from awareness to acceptance, growing in partnership through the fostering of mutual respect and healthy autonomy. Bolstered by our personal growth in integrity, we offer each other the gift of creative fidelity. Too often fidelity gets interpreted as just sexual fidelity, and even that concept is limited to the act of intercourse. Real sexual fidelity is an act of communion, and real

fidelity includes but is not limited to the realm of the sexual. Fidelity demands the highest loyalty that invites us to desire the good of another person. This sort of fidelity helps us move far beyond the level of sacrifice to the quiet expression of our heart's deepest connections. It builds on the virtues of constancy and perseverance that strengthen us to extend the gift of ourselves over the course of a lifetime. To live with fidelity means to attend to the small things that keep our souls engaged in what we are doing.

The wisdom of merciful forgiveness also plays a large role in mature relationships. The need to forgive and be forgiven exists throughout our lives as those we love hurt us and we hurt them in return. Our ability to offer each other this gift is fostered by our willingness to move from ego-dominated concerns to the deeper levels of the Self, where we are transformed in Christ, the image of God. Our capacity for self-forgiveness becomes a life-giving force and a healing spring that flows outward, extending forgiveness to others, not from a perspective of superiority but from the recognition of our common clay and the brokenness that is an integral part of our human condition.

As we mature in our relationships with others, our search for wisdom also brings about maturation in our relationship with God. A glimpse of mortality or participation in a life review might serve to renew our interest in relationship with God. Often enough, it is only at midlife or beyond that we are able to see, as did Julian of Norwich, that indeed *All will be well*, for we are met at each turn of our life journey by a God abounding in steadfast love, faithfulness and compassionate forgiveness.

Our efforts to build friendships over the years offer us an opportunity to image the face of God as Trinity. Those who live in relationship image the love and the joy that are the enduring fruits of the mutual giving and receiving of Father, Son and Spirit. Relationships that mature into genuine friendships offer us opportunities to experience the gifts of deepening love. They stimulate our growth in a spirit of welcome and hospitality that, seeing no strangers, invites all to the table in fellowship.

THE TRANSPERSONAL DIMENSION

We move now to the third aspect of the wisdom path to Christian maturity, namely, the transpersonal dimension. Here we connect with the wisdom of self-transcendence and experience another dimension of

The need to forgive and be forgiven exists throughout our lives as those we love hurt us and we hurt them in return.

the gospel reminder that we who would save our lives must lose them. Those selves we constructed so carefully must be given over, given up, transcended if we are to continue our growth into wisdom.

Psychologists maintain that the developmental course of wisdom is linked with the maturation of the self, which moves from an egocentric focus to a universalistic view of reality. As this process continues, we make more use of our abilities as tools, not for personal gain, but for the benefit of the community, the world, the spiritual realm. As Christians, we realize that we were invited to self-transcendence through our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that incorporates us into the Body of Christ. Participation in the Eucharist continues this work of transformation. While there is no doubt that self-transcendence does demand the death of our individual egos, we might be less daunted if we approached it as an invitation to expand our sense of self. Although we never reach transcendence without suffering, our reward is the attainment of a larger sense of identity, a humbling but gratifying shift to a more accommodating, more expansive and more joyous identity.

Psychologists Joan and Erik Erikson identified a life-stage they called grand-generativity that spoke to issues of self-transcendence. For them, the sense of "I" in later life has a final chance of transcending time-bound identities and sensing, however vaguely, an expanded identity such as that which the major world religions have attempted to create. The special virtue they saw as characteristic of this stage was that of Caring — although I would call it Compassion. This compassion is not something limited to a closed circle of friends but opens to embrace a wider circle not defined by proximity or bound by time. Moving us beyond the

Accepting the fact we are going to die is one of the more difficult tasks that we face, no matter what our age when death draws near.

customary limits of our separate selves, compassion recognizes the ties that bind us all to each other.

KINSHIP WITH THE EARTH COMMUNITY

Another aspect of the wisdom of self-transcendence involves our kinship with the earth community. Albert Einstein fostered this wisdom as he urged us to widen our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Care of the earth is one way of expressing this sort of wisdom as it draws our focus of concern away from our individual selves and from our tendency to place an exaggerated emphasis on human needs. It invites us to consider the needs of the non-human inhabitants of the earth, to relate to the earth from their perspective. Finding that we are no longer the center of the universe, we may take our place humbly as just a small part of the community of life on our planet. Yet, as we do so, we may be rewarded with a sense of cosmic consciousness, the sense of ourselves embedded in and at one with the universe.

As we develop into mature Christians we must come to grips with issues of mortality. Accepting the fact we are going to die is one of the more difficult tasks that we face, no matter what our age when death draws near. It is not easy to make the shift from self-love centered on our specific, individual selves to a concept of participation in a self that goes far beyond the boundaries of the individual in space and time. Although we speak of our membership in the Mystical Body of Christ, for most of us, most of the time, our

membership is bound to our concrete bodily selves. Yet, those who work with the sick and the dying often remark on their ability to pass through a period of painful confusion, loneliness and grief only to enter into a profound sense of belonging to a life that transcends the life of the body.

DEVELOPING HUMOR TO COPE WITH MORTALITY

What virtues might we develop to help us cope with our mortality issues? Humor would appear to be both a means and an end. Not the defensive humor that signals denial but the humor that is tinged with sadness as we recognize the unalterable reality of our mortality; rather, the humor that reflects a quiet inner triumph as we shift our focus from our long-cherished selves to the ideals and the wider world with which we identify. Another means through which we might achieve a measure of self-transcendence is that of creativity. Although we are tempted to limit our understanding of creativity to something over and beyond the ordinary, in fact we always are creating. And when we accept our innate creativity and harness it to courage and fortitude needed for sustained commitment, we are empowered to move forward and to persevere despite obstacles. In the end, nothing we might create is of greater value than our life, constructed from the raw material of the experiences we have accrued over time. If we consider our lives as works of art, we will have a sense of satisfaction and, knowing when it is time to frame our personal painting, we open ourselves to the contentment experienced in acknowledging a job well done.

WISDOM OF SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

As we consider the wisdom of self-transcendence, let us not forget that prayer brings about, however slowly, our transformation into Christ. Our images of transformation vary with our religious sensitivities. We may experience this transformation as the indwelling of the Trinity, or we may image ourselves as one of the branches engrafted onto Jesus the Vine. This process of divinization is an ongoing process of unification and concentration that calls us to a deepening penetration into the mystery of God's love. As Gregory of Nyssa assures us, we move from glory to glory.

One of the darker paths we are invited to walk as we make our way to Christian maturity is that of

accepting our limitations. Throughout our lives we experience periods of impasse, the ambiguity of which invite us to know, not by our usual logic, but through our imagination, our intuition or our use of archetypal images. We may experience life as metaphor and struggle with our issues, wondering if the darkness will ever lift. Shifting from ordinary levels of thought opens us to a new world-view and the experience of mystery. If we can resist our urge to seek immediate answers, we may come to value the wisdom of the question.

Whether or not we engage in the practice of a life review or keep a spiritual journal as an aid to self-knowledge, at some point each of us is likely to experience existential guilt, the product of our limitedness and finiteness. This sort of guilt stems from the fact that many of our crucial life decisions are based on less awareness and knowledge than is potentially available at the time. "If I had only known..." is a refrain that often signals the presence of existential guilt. Accepting our limits, recognizing the existence of tragedy and guilt as part of our lives, is a necessity if we are to experience further growth. While we are not totally at the mercy of random happenings, neither are we totally in control of all life's circumstances. We live by making choices and by our willingness to bear the consequences of those choices, those we could foresee and those we could not.

ACCEPTING THE MYSTERY OF THE GIFT OF LIFE

As we come to accept the mystery of the gift of life, our sense of rootedness, of being grounded in and connected to the whole of life is strengthened. We are invited to make a leap of faith that is an affirmation of our being, our sharing in the awesome reality of creation. Faith, in this context, is a quality of our persons, not a belief in a particular set of doctrines. It is a way of orienting ourselves to self, to others, to the universe that sees, feels and acts in light of a transcendent dimension. Faith of this sort is akin to the biblical sense of knowledge reached through relationship, through participation in the reality we desire to know. Faith enlarges our sense of personal identity, encourages us to live lives of dedicated responsibility and increases our ability to commit ourselves to a lifestyle that embraces our values. As a result, we participate actively in our lives, expressing our authentic identity by living in ways that require a total involvement of our persons.

We may experience life as metaphor and struggle with our issues, wondering if the darkness will ever lift. Shifting from ordinary levels of thought opens us to a new world-view and the experience of mystery.

EMBRACING THE HARD QUESTIONS

The mystery of life also involves suffering, and in such moments we come to wisdom as Job did — by embracing the hard questions. Suffering offers us an opportunity to move out of our ego attachments and opens us to the mystery we name *grace*. Suffering helps us let go of old ways and means and directs us to new learning. It is an emptying and purifying process that strips away our pretenses and our illusions and prepares us to receive a clearer, fuller vision of what life is, who God is, and who we are.

The Christian tradition, since the time of Paul, has held up the mystery of the cross as a symbol of wisdom. Sad to say, some who misunderstood Paul's writings began to valorize suffering, misusing the theology of the cross to keep women, children or minorities silent victims. The wisdom of the cross is made known only to those taught by the Spirit of God but, as we contemplate its mystery, we come to appreciate it as a resolution to the impasse we experience when confronted by the limits of our human knowledge. Because the cross does not make sense in human terms, it is a sign of the reconciliation of opposites, the revelation of a greater truth than we can encompass. Contemplation of the mystery of the cross offers us another way of thinking about, feeling and experiencing the pattern of our lives. Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson suggests that the cross is part of the larger mystery of pain-to-life. She would align it with the struggle for the new creation that evokes the rhythm of pregnancy, delivery and birth so familiar to women of all times.

Fear aroused by the thought of our death is probably at the base of all other anxieties that we experience.

Our willingness to act responsibly is interlaced with the limits of our ability to know and to understand situations and ourselves.

Rather than hide from the reality of limits and endings, especially those associated with death, we might want to think about living as an artistic enterprise, somewhat like painting a picture. Part of the artistry in a great picture is dependent on the artist's knowing when to stop. It means being aware of what needs to be included, certain enough of one's sense of style to omit the unnecessary and secure enough to put a frame around the picture and call it complete.

As we acknowledge life's impermanence, however, we discover a thrust toward immortality. While some may perceive this as a negation of death's reality, desire for and anticipation of eternal life exists in all cultures. We are engaged in a process of transformation that is achieved only by our experiencing deterioration and dissolution, passing through the gates of death and decay. A high level of trust is needed as we make our way toward our final transformation. D.H. Lawrence wrote: "Then I must know that still / I am in the hands of the unknown God, / he is breaking me down to his new oblivion / to send me forth on a new morning, a new man." This promise of transforming rebirth draws us forward in a spirit of hope. With Job (19:25-26) we proclaim: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God."

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY/SPIRITUALITY

Continuing our exploration of wisdom's transpersonal path, we come to recognize the power of our choices. They shape us and give us form. As we make decisions, our spirits stand forth in the light and are embodied. Our choices impress their images upon our

souls — thus we need to exercise our freedom carefully — not squander it on trifles. We become, in the end, that on which we set our gaze, that which we love. Our selves are tied up with the object of our choices so that we do not simply appreciate or desire these objects; we become in some way identified with them.

Genuine choices, commitments, can be made only when we are willing to accept responsibility for our lives because self-responsibility lies at the heart of our inner strength. By exercising our freedom to choose, and making and keeping commitments to ourselves and to others, we demonstrate our growth in personal integrity and in the exercise of flexible self-control. Our willingness to act responsibly is interlaced with the limits of our ability to know and to understand situations and ourselves. Instead of thinking of this intertwining of limitation and responsibility as a noose around our necks, we might take a wisdom approach and consider them forming an intricate Celtic knot. Rather than being so fearful of making mistakes that we fail to make choices, we may take comfort from recognizing that in our mistakes there is wisdom that will guide us toward the next step along our path to wholeness.

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR LIFE

Accepting responsibility for our lives allows us to share in the creation of meaning or purpose. It enables us to respond to the question posed by poet Mary Oliver: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do/ with your one wild and precious life?" (*The Summer Day*) Keeping this question in mind fosters our living with attention and intention. It offers us an opportunity for personal fulfillment and allows us to attach significance to our actions — even the small ones. Accepting responsibility for our lives heightens our sense of direction, enhances our sense of purposefulness and fosters our ability to order and organize our choices.

Meaning has a demanding and challenging side to it as well. It has the power to summon us, asking that we live with authenticity, honoring our deepest commitments. For some of us, this means embodying our dream — for others of us it may take the form of a life-long quest that guides our life's journey. When we consider meaning as having the power to summon, we recognize that our essential commitments often are symbolic of the deeper directions in which our lives move. These commitments subtly season our lives as they

touch our fundamental convictions that are often more a matter of the heart than of the head. Often enough these commitments are discovered slowly and named gradually as we learn to center ourselves and respond to the currents that run deepest inside us, although for some, these commitments come into sharp focus much earlier in life.

No matter at what point in life our essential commitment becomes clear to us, we all have some sort of mission or vocation in life that flows from our spiritual lives and literally demands fulfillment. In living out our mission, we honor the truth of our identity and discover the gifts we are intended to offer the world. Each of us is unique — so if we fail to live out our essential commitment, that piece of God's work remains undone. Developing our sense of mission and working to honor our commitment to life effect our sense of resiliency and overcome the emptiness that is a component in many forms of depression, anxiety and other mental disorders.

RECORDING THE EVENTS OF OUR LIFE

How to discover our basic commitments and come to recognize the meaning of our lives? One good way is to write an autobiography or conduct a life review. While recounting the events of our lives, we may discover basic, recurring themes. Reflecting on these themes and their paradoxes offers us insight into the mystery of our selves. This knowledge of self has the potential to help us uncover and articulate a philosophy of life or spirituality that has served to give our lives meaning and direction. These stories of our selves serve as our personal creation myths. They offer us interpretive understandings of our lives as we have lived them thus far — and serve as guidelines that suggest how to live more fully and deeply. Storytelling of this sort helps us appreciate the unfolding of our lives and weave into the whole cloth of our being events that otherwise might have been left isolated and meaningless.

It is time to journey further. Seeking wisdom is a lifelong quest; it is a searching that broadens our horizons and deepens our understanding. Wisdom's complexity and richness never can be exhausted or limited to specific individual acts. What we hope to develop over the course of time is discernment, the art of applying to the present moment the experiential knowledge we have gained in the past. As we journey along the spiral paths of our lives, our willingness to devote time

Seeking wisdom is a lifelong quest; it is a searching that broadens our horizons and deepens our understanding.

and effort to our development as individuals, in relationship with others, and, finally, toward self-transcendence brings us to the fullness of Christian maturity and the crown of wisdom.

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The Church Needs a

Theologically Educated Laity

Michael J. Sheeran, S.J.



The following article is based on a talk given at the First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver, CO, June 3-4, 2005. The author is president of Regis University — The Editor.

The theme of the First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium, “Christian Maturity,” puts me in mind of my first teaching experience — three years in the mid-sixties at Regis Jesuit High School. They were good years as I tried to help boys grow into men.

There is a lot you can learn from the relationship of a fifteen-year-old to his parents and teachers. A younger child is grateful to be “told,” to be kept safe from danger. With puberty there comes a new capacity to think for oneself and a sometimes dangerous need to assert one’s independence. The parent prays that the mistakes will do no lasting harm. Even when we get them as eighteen-year-olds at Regis University, they are still in this developmental stage. That is why our residence hall rules inculcate “structured freedom,” where there is no such thing as “lights out,” but drugs and alcohol in the hall are forbidden. The student may stub his toe, but not break his leg. In those adolescent years, the child’s new capacity to think is real. But skills, self-discipline, experience fall short.

Parents tend to see their teen-age child’s limitations and to underestimate the level of maturity. So the fifteen-year-old, or even

the eighteen-year-old, may be treated like a twelve-year-old. Every year at Regis University at least one mother accompanies her college freshman son or daughter through academic advising and student orientation because she does not trust her offspring to make good choices.

THE CHURCH LEADERS AS OVER-PROTECTIVE PARENT

We can learn from this description of the situation of teen-agers and their parents. With all due respect, I would like to suggest that laypersons in the United States have a lot in common with teen-age adolescents. And church leaders sometimes show the same characteristics as over-protective parents. Let us see if the analogy holds and how well.

Beginning roughly in the middle of the twentieth century, the church in the Developed World has experienced a novelty: First, laypeople can read. Second, very many of them have extensive educations in intellectually challenging areas. When they tackled a discipline such as business or engineering or chemistry or literature, they learned a good deal of logic and analytic skill and critical thinking. Never before in history has this level of education been so common.

Now these educated laypeople differ from the people in the pews in all the centuries before because, as a result of their education, they are self-confident about their own judgment. If they have gained competence in an academic area, they feel comfortable about making judgments in other areas as well. But, like teen-agers, they may mistake competence in one area for competence in all areas. I recall my first visit to New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) with a wizened uncle. A good commercial realtor whose judgment about leases was virtually infallible, he could not fathom the non-realistic works on display and proclaimed his disappointment with a vigor I hoped other patrons would not overhear. (In all candor, I knew the works were good because I had heard of the artists. But I could not appreciate them, either. However, I knew enough to keep quiet as I stared.) The incident underscored for me that competence in one area — leases — can create inappropriate self-confidence in another — art appreciation.

I am reminded of articles in Denver newspapers in the 1960s about Midwestern doctors who flew their Piper Cubs up Colorado box canyons and crashed into the canyon walls because they did not have the lift at

Today's laity may know accounting or engineering or management, but they often have a First Communion catechism knowledge of theology.

Rocky Mountain altitude to get out of the canyon. Most of these doctors had been warned that their planes did not have the same lift in mountain air that they had in St. Louis or Kansas City. But they thought they knew better. After all, they were doctors.

LACKING KNOWLEDGE OF THEOLOGY

Today's laity may know accounting or engineering or management, but they often have a First Communion catechism knowledge of theology. This reality is often not the person's fault. The American church's abandonment of so many grade and high schools in the years after Vatican II means that very many Catholics now in their fifties and younger had just minimal religious education available in their parishes. Current efforts to upgrade Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) programs and to deepen the quality of religious instruction in remaining Catholic schools are welcome, indeed, but they serve a disturbingly small portion of Catholic youth subsequent to their training for First Communion. Meantime, the parents of today's youngsters often stopped any serious learning of church doctrine once they had received First Communion. So these parents have little religious insight to pass along to their offspring.

Sources of learning for these adults are limited. Many of today's American Catholics obtain most of their knowledge of the church from the secular press. The New York Times' coverage of the last papal election, for example, was provided by two Jewish reporters. The reporting was accurate, but lacked theological context and depth.

The temptation of the clergy is to focus on the

I believe that in all humans, there is a deep but dangerous hunger for certitude. This hunger is extremely valuable because it helps us establish the central beliefs around which we construct our lives.

laity's shortcomings in theology and use that as their rationale for offering laypeople as little authority as possible. Just as in the first nineteen centuries of illiteracy, laity should pray, pay and obey. Just as an over-confident seventeen-year-old has lots of good insights but a lack of experience, the layperson has lots of good insights (and good experience) but lacks the careful systematic thought structure and even the accurate language to express insights accurately. So it is easy for the clergyman to give in to the temptation to keep the church's decision-making out of the hands of the "well-meaning but unprepared" laity.

Such has been the pattern for years as parish pastoral councils lost their role in most parishes — if they ever were even tried. Paradoxically, this exclusion has changed dramatically with the revelation of the sex abuse scandals. If any good comes from this crisis, it is that laypeople are absolutely confident that they have the right to protect their children. So they have demanded a place at the decision-making table concerning priestly conduct.

PRECEDENT FOR ACCOMMODATING LAY COMPETENCIES

Further, laypeople also know they have more competence than clergy in financial and political matters. Whether — now that the laity is gaining new roles in guaranteeing sexual accountability — they will continue to acquiesce in the old patterns and leave finances and political priorities in the hands of the clergy remains to be seen.

There is, in American church history, some precedent for accommodating lay competencies in the

church's decisions. In the nineteenth century, Bishop John England set up — in Charleston, South Carolina — a diocesan legislature where representatives of the clergy handled orthodoxy of teaching, and a blend of laity and clergy controlled personnel policies, budgets and fiscal accountability. This legislature operated from 1822 until the bishop's death in 1842, with no objection from Rome.

While such a legislature might be a good initial step in empowering the laity, the real goal for the church should be that lay Catholics develop their short suit in theology, so that they expand their theological competence to an adult level, if not to the level of their secular training. After all, this sort of competence is essential for the balanced development of any educated human person. This means a new emphasis on Catholic education for adults and not just children. This will be education appropriate to the adult mind, an education that goes beyond memorizing answers and puts church teaching in context, that recognizes why others disagree and explores how church teaching is derived from scripture, tradition, insights into human nature, etc.

PREFERENCE FOR SIMPLE ANSWERS

Such adult thinking runs counter to a deep preference for simple, unambiguous answers that marks so many people. I believe that in all humans, there is a deep but dangerous hunger for certitude. This hunger is extremely valuable because it helps us establish the central beliefs around which we construct our lives. But, for many people, the quest for certitude goes to excess. They seek certitude where the reality is ambiguous and one's choice of conduct can be based only on a guess or a hunch or a custom, not on a principle. The temptation is to try to find certitude where there is only ambiguity. If one turns custom into a matter of certitude, one distorts reality rather than clarifies it.

Consider the last American presidential election. I met plenty of people who were delighted that a few bishops had "taken a stand" and indicated that a faithful Catholic could not vote for a pro-choice candidate. These enthusiasts were dismayed that the rest of the bishops didn't manifest the same clarity. And, when (then) Cardinal Ratzinger's letter to Cardinal McCarrick was made public, these same people quietly ignored his comment that a conscientious pro-life

Catholic weighs all issues — not just right to life — in the voting booth. Here is what Cardinal Ratzinger said:

When a Catholic does not share a candidate's stand in favor of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for [a pro-choice] candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons (Denver Catholic Register, July 21, 2004).

To exercise the sort of judgment Cardinal Ratzinger envisions, the voter must be prepared to make a prudent assessment of the competing candidates, without the clarity of simple certitude. Learning to live with such ambiguity is not something that comes with memorizing catechism for First Communion. The capacity to make such a judgment is the fruit of adult reflection on how to apply one's beliefs as a Catholic to the ambiguous realities of life.

A number of Catholic universities are hearing from their alumni and the parents of their students that educated Catholics in their thirties and forties and fifties are looking for reliable updating of their religious knowledge and experience. Many Catholic schools are beginning to provide retreats and workshops on topics like "Contemporary Catholic Thought," "Jesuit (or Dominican or Benedictine or Franciscan) Spirituality," "Authority in the Church," etc. Creighton University in Omaha has pioneered readings and even online retreats (see <http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html>). Boston College has shown remarkable leadership in its forums on the future of the church. Key articles and transcripts from its "Church in the 21st Century" initiative are extremely helpful to any college-educated adult engaged in this quest (see <http://www.bc.edu/church21/>). Not to be outdone, the Marianists' University of Dayton is developing a series of online mini-courses designed to bring Catholics up-to-date on Catholic theology and practice.

THEOLOGY FOR ALUMNI

The need for real Catholic education for adults is why Regis University said "Yes" when Father James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., invited us to sponsor HUMAN DEVELOPMENT magazine, with its expanded emphasis on spiritual and psychological growth of Catholic adults, such as the alumni of Jesuit schools. And —

Education for adults supposes generally experienced, mature participants. It is not memorizing answers and simply "taking on faith" what is not clear, the way a first grader must do.

like its peers — Regis is experimenting with short courses in theology for alumni both at our campuses and online, as well as with links on the alumni web site to Catholic sites for theology and spirituality (see <http://www.regis.edu/regis.asp?sctn=alum&pl=serv>).

Such education and empowerment of adults creates a challenge to those who think clerical governance is part of the nature of the church. I believe that, in this "age of the laity," it is time for competent lay leaders gradually to share power with clergy, not only in sexual and fiscal accountability, but even in areas like the formation of political priorities.

This enhancement of adult lay religious competence involves a different sort of education from the training of seven-year-olds. Education for adults supposes generally experienced, mature participants. It is not memorizing answers and simply "taking on faith" what is not clear, the way a first grader must do. (I have been told by some clergy and laity that such memorization is precisely the correct model for college freshmen.) Instead, adult education involves using that mature brain to think through the issues.

Questions arising out of a basic faith that seeks understanding can be a challenge to priests or other laity who have not themselves grappled with a particular issue. Like parents of teens, such listeners can wish the questioner would just stop asking.

CONFLICTS WITH PARENTS

The conflict between questioning adults and church authorities seems to have a lot in common with

Being an adult, assuming responsibility to learn and to listen and to think, is not easy. But that's precisely the call of the educated layperson (and clergyman).

the conflict between teens and their parents. You can always spot a really immature teen by how they react when their parents turn out to be wrong on something. Suppose dad says, "I don't care if it is the prom. Be home by your regular hour of 11:30." Or, suppose mom says, "So what if everybody else is buying Dockers. The K-Mart generic slacks look fine on you, and that's what you'll buy, and nobody else will notice." In both cases, the parent is out of touch with what the child will experience in the way of teasing from peers.

The immature child — as soon as the parent mis-reads and mis-commands — feels absolved of ever taking the parent seriously again. The mature child, on the other hand, realizes that his or her parents were wrong this once. But he or she knows they usually are right and that he or she should listen to them — even give them the benefit of the doubt — next time.

It is very much this way with church leaders questioning laypeople. When there is non-infallible but clear church teaching on birth control or women's ordination or the death penalty or preemptive war, the immature Catholic adult always can say, "Well, the church was wrong on usury and slavery, so I have no obligation to take this current teaching seriously. It's the church's job to prove it to me."

The mature Catholic takes a very different tack, saying:

Sure, the church has sometimes been wrong in its official teaching. But most of the time, it has been very right. I've got to give current teaching the strong benefit of the doubt. And I need to study it and think it through if I don't feel comfortable with it. Only if I do all that and become convinced the teaching is wrong, am I free [in fact, "obliged"] to dissent.

As Cardinal Newman argued, for individual conscience to be

*a sacred and sovereign monitor, [conscience can] prevail against the voice of the Pope [only after] serious thought, prayer, and [use of] all available means of arriving at a right judgment....The burden of proof...[is] borne by the individual's] conscience ("Letter to the Duke of Norfolk," quoted in *Human Life In Our Day*, pastoral letter of the American hierarchy issued November 15, 1968, Para. 40).*

But, granted that burden of proof, Cardinal Newman still emphasizes that one must follow one's well-informed conscience. For example, Newman comments on an after-dinner toast he is going to give. He says, "I shall drink — to the Pope, if you please — still to conscience first, and to the Pope afterward" ("Letter to the Duke of Norfolk").

Being an adult, assuming responsibility to learn and to listen and to think, is not easy. But that's precisely the call of the educated layperson (and clergyman). In responding to that call, we find our holiness as we grow into responsible, mature Catholics. This is our call as Christians to true human development.



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We Have a Dream

James Torrens, S.J.

I Captivi (The Captives)

Michael the Angel sees within the stone
the flesh-bound figures straining to emerge,
and freedom is the goal for which they groan.

Young male slave, in gleaming vigor shown,
whose arm defends an eye from the sun's surge,
Michael the Angel peers at in the stone.

An Atlas, bracing up a head not bone
but block of marble on his shoulder's verge,
knows freedom as a prize for which to groan.

One wakening, his blurry head still prone,
his flesh awake where loins and thigh converge,
Michael the Angel sees within the stone.

A bearded one, his legs in bands, is shown
with visage clawed, our image left a scourge,
and freedom is the goal that makes him groan.

These captive four, each straining and alone,
unable to revive the chisel's flagging urge,
Michael the Angel leaves within the stone,
and freedom is the goal for which they groan.

Few moments in American history can rank for drama with Martin Luther King's address, "I Have a Dream," in August of 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Dr. King brings all the hopes of the civil rights movement to a crescendo with his concluding plea, "let freedom ring." No one who has heard a recording of this

speech will forget its closing words. King envisions all of God's children joining hands and, "in the words of the old Negro spiritual," singing "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

At roughly the same time, a parallel version of this outcry was sounding in East Africa during the various independence movements. Those who know no other word of Swahili will recognize "Uhuru!" Freedom always has been a dream, a deep longing, of the oppressed. It has been as well a ready theme of politicos and a strong yearning of adolescents for as long as anyone can remember. The term "freedom" has a huge elasticity, plus convenient areas of vagueness, as we can tell from its use in international politics. The countries freeing themselves from occupation turn out, almost always, to be just on the first step toward the maturity of authentic freedom.

Freedom consists of much more than just people keeping their hands off of us. It is a matter of directing ourselves rightly, once we are able to. It is fundamentally a spiritual task. According to Harvey Egan, S.J., this was a continual motif of the theologian Karl Rahner:

Rahner understands the human person as a self-conscious and free being, as one endowed with the capability to co-create oneself freely with God the way one will be for all eternity. . . . Persons actually become their free decisions. Thus freedom is not the ability to do this or that; rather it is the ability to say yes or no to God with one's entire being (Karl Rahner, Mystic of Everyday Life, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998, p. 32).

Freedom requires a long journey inwards, a journey fraught with obstacles. Ask the psychiatrists. They spend themselves trying to help people emerge from phobias, rages, haunting memories,

hampered self-confidence. Anyone who has achieved a measure of maturity and self-knowledge is aware of the areas of resistance and darkness within. Each of us is to some small or large degree unfree.

In a museum in Florence, Italy, the Galleria dell' Accademia, better known for holding the original of Michelangelo's "David," we get a graphic lesson in un-freedom. The Galleria contains four statues known as "I Captivi" ("The Captives"), by a Michelangelo older and increasingly frustrated by his sense of human and spiritual limitations. The four statues originally were meant for the tomb of that conquering pope, Julius II. Commentators on these Herculean figures discuss the unavoidable impression they make, that the captives "are struggling to liberate themselves from their burden of uncarved stone." Alas, theirs is an "ultimately hopeless struggle" (Glenn Andres, John Hunisak and Richard Turner, in *The Art of Florence*, Volume II, Abbeville Press, 1988).

The same theme of impaired freedom is wonderfully caught in Saint John's gospel, when Lazarus emerges from his tomb, "tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth" (11:44). We marvel he could move at all. Jesus has to instruct those present, "Untie him and let him go." It is an instruction that Jesus still issues, not just to those in the helping ministries but to anyone who can help anyone else emerge from bonds. Alcoholics Anonymous and the twelve-step movements derived from A.A. have given themselves to that task.

Saint Paul, writing to the Galatians, takes on the topic of spiritual freedom as his principal concern. He makes his point in this elusive aphorism: "For freedom Christ set us free" (5:1). Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., helps illuminate Paul's teaching. He begins by showing how often

the terminology of "slave" gets employed in *Galatians*, as a counterpoint to freedom. Then he explains:

What Paul wanted to get across was that society in its most basic elements, the very structure of society, was oppressive. . . . Paul was not so naive as to believe that the deeply ingrained habits of a lifetime were automatically eradicated by the act of conversion. . . . He warns the Galatians that if the victory of "the desires of the spirit" over "the desires of the flesh" is a victory only in principle, then their freedom will exist only in theory. . . . A possibility has been offered them; it is up to them to make it real (Paul: A Critical Life, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 208).

Achieving freedom is a process. A full, unhampered exercise of freedom is possible only at the end. Dante Alighieri made this vivid and clear in the "Hell" and "Purgatory" sections of *The Divine Comedy*, that poetic account of his visionary travel to the next world. Dante is dragged through hell as a horrified observer, but sometimes a sympathetic witness, of punishment measured to specific sins. In his vision, specific sufferings are dictated by the deviations that produce them. Emerging from hell with his guide Virgil, Dante is then led up the mountain of Purgatory, with its seven terraces to match the seven capital sins. Expurgation of a sinful past here means a willing acceptance of the effects upon us of our sinful tendencies, our distorted forms of love.

Dante is a kind of Everyman, who has to suffer with those he meets in Purgatory the painful consequences of pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust. This heavy penance grows lighter upon him tier by tier as Dante ascends. Finally a moment comes when his guide

Virgil, the great chronicler and interpreter of human experience, can go no further with him. Virgil says: “Free, upright and healthy is your will, / it would be wrong not to follow its lead, / therefore I crown and miter you over yourself” (Canto 27, v. 140-42). In other words, you are in authority over yourself. You are free. Now, and only now, with unimpeded heart, you can authentically and responsibly choose your way.

The way leads toward full membership in the community, the blessed community. That, says Murphy-O’Connor, is “the principle underlying Paul’s understanding of enslavement and freedom. What promotes community generates freedom, whereas what militates against community destroys freedom” (p. 209). Integration into community, the Mystical Body, is exactly the goal proposed in the letter known as *Ephesians*. We are urged to be “no longer infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching

arising from human trickery” (4:14). Much rather, we are told, be intent on “mature personhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (4:13). His next sentence is a memorable formulation of Christianity: “Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head” (4:15).

Right there is the project of a lifetime. The freedom we dream of is not to be realized in full dress tomorrow but to be grown toward and into, day by day.



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The Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium on “Spirituality and Healthy Living” will be held at Regis University in Denver, CO. Please visit our website (www.regis.edu/hd) for details.

Fostering/Hindering Christian Maturity

Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.



Father James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., the founder of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, always encouraged healthy development toward maturity. In this article the author begins by considering some characteristics of "Christian" maturity and then looks at some attitudes and practices that help foster this type of maturity and at some factors that hinder progress towards it. She concludes with a few reflections on challenges in Christian maturity for us and our church today. This article is in conjunction with the First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver, CO, June 3-4, 2005. — The Editor.

"CHRISTIAN" Maturity

Maturity is the outcome of a developmental process. We are called to grow continually into maturity, to be present to and interact with life experiences in such a way that, as long as we are alive, we are never totally finished with the process of becoming more integrated and more whole. From my perspective as a clinical psychologist and as a peace psychologist, I would like to suggest several characteristics of a maturity that is specifically "Christian."

- Christian maturity is Gospel-centered. These days, one hears much talk about self-realization, about the process of finding oneself and about the individual's gratifying his or her desires as the most important goals in life. By contrast, entering into a journey toward maturity as a Christian necessitates becoming and remaining centered in Gospel values and imperatives. Values of compassion, solidarity, service, truth-telling, option for the poor and marginalized, openness to transformation, willingness to release — even die to — what is not life-giving and what keeps us from recognizing and building up God's reign?

- Christian maturity is discipleship-centered. As Biblical scholar Francis Moloney points out, Christian discipleship is first about being with Jesus, about having an intimate relationship with him, and then about following Jesus — staying behind him, letting him lead and accepting to go where he leads. Commitment to discipleship thus requires each one of us to ask ourselves what it means for us, in our lives, to stay behind Jesus, to follow where he and his Spirit lead, rather than taking the lead ourselves; commitment to discipleship requires each of us to be aware as to whether we are following the poor, chaste, humble and profoundly challenging Jesus of Nazareth, or some Hallmark or Hollywood image of Jesus, or ourselves, or someone or something else. In an idolatrous age, it is all too easy for good people to fall into the trap of following one or many idols (money, possessions, status, prestige, power, security, holding the moral high ground, preserving a way of life, bowing to the bottom line...), which, subtly, insidiously shift our direction and commitments away from the demands of Gospel discipleship.

- Christian maturity is relation-centered. Jesus' power, the power so unsettling and threatening to many of his contemporaries, is relational power, the horizontal power of interaction among equally valued children of God, rather than the vertical power of hierarchy, which rank-orders the goodness of God's creation. Thus, Christian maturity requires that we foster healthy relationships in our lives, with ourselves, with others and with God. Several characteristics of psychosexual maturity also are essential for relational Christian maturity: An ability to pursue healthy intimacy and relationships and to live relationally; an ability to sustain intimate relationships that are honest, non-manipulative and non-judgmental; a capacity to love specific individuals, with their foibles and struggles,

Christian maturity requires that we foster healthy relationships in our lives, with ourselves, with others and with God.

rather than just loving abstract "humanity"; an ability, in the words of author Ronald Rolheiser, to give oneself over to community, friendship, service, creativity, humor, delight, sacrifice, even martyrdom in order to bring life into the world. An intimate relationship, a friendship with Christ is the essential foundation for a mature, adult life of faith, discipleship and effective, collaborative leadership in the Christian community. Relation-centered Christian living asks that we nurture a growing "we-consciousness" rather than settling into the "I-consciousness" the culture encourages. As author Sue Monk Kidd suggests, we have to be asking how big is our "we"? Whom does it embrace? How broadly do we measure the impact of our choices, our action or inaction? What does it mean for us to mature relationally in a way that witnesses more and more to our friendship with Jesus of Nazareth? Can we move from resting in a faith experience centered only on our personal relationship with God, to engaging a faith experience rooted in God's action in the social reality around us and in the call to be agents of that action?

- Christian maturity involves a willingness to see clearly. As Christians we aim toward a willingness to have our eyes opened to the reality around us, to see beyond and through the filters imposed by culture and society, to begin seeing through a Gospel filter. Theologian Jon Sobrino speaks about "culpable blindness" to describe the problem of not wanting to see reality as it truly is, which leads to a falsification of reality and, existentially, to a self-interested way of understanding reality. A mature willingness to see clearly

Growth into both spiritual and psychological maturity always is connected to painful processes of “purification.”

opens us, inevitably, to the discomfort of realizing our own contributions to current reality and to the implicit question of whether we will take up our responsibility to respond in a way that will bring reality into closer alignment with Gospel values. This is not a small challenge in our current world, in which so often people are intentionally presented versions of reality that keep them “blind” to its more troubling aspects, those that would most urgently cry out for attention, outrage and change. Christian maturity calls us to take responsibility for determining whether what we are handed as “reality” actually corresponds to the whole of reality, and for renouncing a passivity that allows us not to see and allows our voices to remain silent.

- Christian maturity involves a willingness to take a stand, a willingness to take a risk for the Gospel, to find and use a prophetic voice (which will sound different for different people) in order to speak a word of challenge, a word of invitation — even when this is uncomfortable for us, even when it may put us on the margins. Christian maturity involves a willingness to work to heal and overcome whatever within us and around us interferes with our taking a stand on behalf of the Gospel. And we all know there is no lack of contexts and opportunities to take such stands wherever we turn. Of course, it is important to remember that there are many types of personal limitations that affect our ability to take uncomfortable stands. Christian maturity asks that we acknowledge those and work within the boundaries of who we are, but also that we not shrink from standing up when there are no significant obstacles to our doing so.

- Christian maturity involves a willingness to build reconciliation. A willingness to see clearly the different sides of an issue, to listen openly to different voices, to seek common ground and to discern prayerfully God’s

truths beyond the partisan concerns of opposing perspectives. A willingness to commit ourselves to the arduous task of promoting dialogue for as long as is necessary, of providing support and validation to different sides in conflict. Christian maturity asks that we try to cross over the boundaries of cultural and economic differences and pledge ourselves to the hard work of building a true community of communities, particularly within the church, which carries so much division, difference and exclusion. As the U.S. bishops wrote in their pastoral letter, “The Challenge of Peace,” “Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus.”

FOSTERING CHRISTIAN MATURITY

What are some attitudes and practices we can cultivate in order to move further along the way of the type of Christian maturity just described?

- Making a commitment to healing and growth, beginning with ourselves, and moving out to the world around us. A commitment to going inward to do the necessary personal work of identifying and healing (to the extent possible) the wounded, blocked places that keep us bound in many ways, in order then to move outward as agents of healing, growth, even transformation for our communities, societies and church. In contrast to the navel-gazing too often promoted by this age, the going inwards I propose is a work of looking courageously at what needs healing, at what unacknowledged motivations and hidden influences we might be carrying, in service of being more available to going out as effective witnesses to and instruments of God’s love and God’s desire to continuously make all things new. As many of us know, saying “yes” to a journey of growth inevitably brings challenges; self-confrontation is a painful, yet essential, part of maturing — both psychologically and spiritually. Growth into both spiritual and psychological maturity always is connected to painful processes of “purification.” Because of this, many people (especially when they carry significant emotional hurts and injuries that have not been healed) resist embarking on such a journey, preferring to stay where they are, more or less comfortably settled into life, but forfeiting the opportunities to be stretched into fully becoming the persons God made them to be as mature adult Christians.

- Moving from unconscious to conscious loving. The gospels make it abundantly clear that the Christian way — the mature Christian way — consists in loving. Difficult as it is for us, the invitation is to learn to love as Jesus loved, with insight, compassion, sensitivity, justice and self-surrender. Authors Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon remind us that it is in the process of striving to love as Jesus did that God will make us whole — and that we will become mature Christians. Loving faithfully, loving as Jesus loved, is a coming-to-see process, in which we become conscious of the costs and the realities of loving well, and in which we are able to move beyond the inevitable disappointments and disillusionments to a conscious choice and commitment to love because that has become the only “way” that makes sense and gives life.

- Cultivating a capacity for and a commitment to complex thinking and analysis, with which to understand and address the challenges of our time. The capacity to think and analyze in complex terms, and to wrestle with ourselves when questions are raised that demand personal and structural conversion, is an important dimension of intellectual maturity. At present, we live surrounded by efforts — too often successful — to manipulate and co-opt Christian responses, perceptions and allegiances by presenting simplistic, watered-down readings of complicated situations and by discouraging complex thinking as elitist or unorthodox. The black or white thinking typical of the “you’re with us or you’re against us” mentality works wonderfully to discourage the effort required for complex analysis and to keep many individuals from becoming adult partners in dialogue and even leadership within the Christian community. This mentality also encourages splitting, an unhealthy psychological defense mechanism that virtually eliminates the possibility of integrating differing perspectives and of coming to a more comprehensive understanding of any given situation.

- Situating ourselves in and deriving our perspective from the broad contexts of local community, society, country, continent, hemisphere and global community, rather than just from the personal world immediately surrounding us. This requires informing ourselves about those wider contexts and about the impact of our choices and our behaviors on the realities of those contexts. It also asks us to experience directly some of those realities, particularly as they affect the lives of individuals beyond our daily world. Opening ourselves

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to such experience requires making the effort to journey into those contexts (which we can find not just in other countries, but in certain neighborhoods in our own cities, in our farm fields, on our borders), with the open and humble attitude of one needing to learn, to be taught, to receive, rather than of one who is there to “fix” things and make them conform as much as possible to the reality “back home.” Commitment to this practice of broadening the perspective in which we situate ourselves and from which we make decisions contributes greatly to enhancing the “we-consciousness” so important to Christian maturity.

- Submitting ourselves and our lives to the paschal pattern of Jesus’ life. Allowing necessary deaths (including, perhaps, deaths to some of our unquestioned habits, world-views, assumptions, securities) to lead us into a new life of seeing more clearly, of discovering the joy and the hope of genuine solidarity, of transforming aspects of our lives so that we witness more honestly and effectively to Gospel values. Our Christian tradition is rich in examples of women and men who willingly embraced relinquishment and deaths of many kinds, in order to bring forth life. The journey into Christian maturity challenges us to stay open when circumstances invite us personally into the paschal mystery of dying and rebirth, and to trust in the power of that mystery to transform our own lives, as well as those of others around us.

- Moving from the center to the edge. Growing into Christian maturity is a process of being stretched and challenged and, eventually, drawn out to the edge (which will mean different things to different people). Life teaches us that the place of expansion is always at

Being a mature Christian is not about settling comfortably into the safe and the familiar middle ground of life.

the border or the edge. If we are to become whole and mature, to move beyond safe but restrictive images and understandings of God and of what it means to be Christian, then we must practice going to the edge. Jesus lived and ministered at the edge of his society — which so deeply unsettled the powerful ones of that time. Being a mature Christian is not about settling comfortably into the safe and the familiar middle ground of life. Taking into account our unique set of strengths and limitations, of resources and liabilities, we are called to migrate to the edge, to meet Jesus there and to be bearers of Gospel values from there.

- Making a commitment to transparency in all aspects of our lives. The Christian community has not been exemplary in its ability to live with transparency and integrity. In fact, there always have been and continue to be disturbing situations in which we see not only a failure to live transparently, but also a clear intention to conceal information and misguide people. In the church, as in most institutions, the lack of transparency has been most evident (and has had the most troubling consequences) in the areas of sexuality, handling of power and authority and political dynamics. Christian maturity — living fully as disciples of Jesus Christ, with all that implies — requires a commitment to coherence and truth-telling. Paraphrasing social ethicist Jim Hug, anyone who would give witness to Gospel values of compassion, justice, simplicity and respect for creation must first be just, compassionate, live simply and be a good steward of creation in the eyes of others. Such a person must also examine, with unflinching honesty, his or her modes of acting, possessions and lifestyle and what those convey.

Next, I would like to identify some factors that can make it difficult for individuals to move toward the type of Christian maturity just described.

- Fear in general (all types of fear). Fear can be a huge hindrance to growth in Christian maturity. Fear of taking up the challenging work of personal growth and healing because of what one might experience on the way. Fear of entering into unfamiliar or uncharted waters on that journey and of having to develop new skills for navigating them. Fear of not being accepted, of not knowing what one's identity will become if one relinquishes some old ways of being and begins to open one's eyes, to become conscious in one's relationships, to broaden one's point of reference and to move towards the edge, even to use one's voice. A serious concern arises when individuals are formed in a fear-based Christianity, when fear is used to keep individuals compliant and "in line." Not only is this a psychologically regressive, even damaging, stance that clearly works against maturation; it is also utterly un-Christ-like. Whatever it is about, it is not about modeling oneself and one's faith on Jesus of Nazareth and on Gospel values.

- Fear of discovering, acknowledging and integrating the "shadow." As Au and Cannon point out, the goal of wholeness and maturity from a Christian perspective is quite different from the idea presented by popular culture that wholeness is about "finally getting it all together" in a steady state of harmony and peace. The Christian view sees maturity as an ongoing commitment to being always consciously on the journey, aware of the impact of one's actions and thoughts on the quality of loving that is the fundamental focus of Christian life. Being on the journey necessarily involves dealing with the conflicts and the undesirable, alienated parts of ourselves which constitute our shadow, the "opposite side of our conscious personality." Confronting this shadow side, owning it as one's own and undertaking the work of bringing it to awareness and integrating it into the entirety of who we are (which, by the way, does not mean acting it out), can be a frightening proposition, particularly for individuals who are highly invested in presenting an idealized external persona, free from any negative dimensions. Nonetheless, as long as the shadow is ignored or denied, there is little chance of truly acknowledging one's personal uniqueness, including one's limitations,

and of being willing to be God's instrument within the boundaries of that reality of who we are.

- Lack of contemplative spaces in one's life. It is contemplative space that grounds the essential relational dimensions of Christian maturity. Vital Christian maturity is rooted in the fertile soil of relationship — with God, with oneself, with others. Commitment to creating quiet, open spaces in one's life is essential to nourish that soil in such a way that, as adult Christians, we are then able to perceive and respond to situations according to who we are. Commitment to a contemplative attitude and to contemplative spaces also grounds us deeply in our primary relationship with God, making it far less likely that our actions and our decisions become all about us, rather than about giving life to Gospel values.

- Lack of transparency. Genuine Christian maturity is necessarily about seeing clearly, speaking clearly and truth-telling. Typically, it is fear of some sort that leads to a lack of transparency. We thus need to be concerned about situations, particularly in formation contexts in the church, in which fear of "what might happen" leads both students and formators not to see clearly, to speak clearly, to tell the truth. As a clinician, I have seen hundreds of cases of serious distress and dysfunction that resulted from years in contexts in which there could be no transparency, and in which, consequently, there was no opportunity to grow into responsible Christian maturity. It is a challenge and an urgent invitation to all of us as adult Christians to think hard about the implications of forming individuals for service and leadership in the church in environments where transparency is not a value.

- Lack of awareness of current social/global realities as they really are, and lack of commitment to seek accurate information that reduces the risk of "culpable blindness." We all live in societies in which we are given a version of reality that corresponds to the cultural biases, prerogatives and myths dominant in a particular place and time. Often we are not aware of the prisms through which the whole of reality passes before we can see refracted some slivers of it. Writing about the devastating earthquakes in El Salvador in early 2001, Sobrino notes that an earthquake is, certainly, a natural catastrophe, but it also has historical and social aspects. The catastrophic damage is not caused by nature alone, but is clearly the result of what could have been done — and was not done — to antic-

We all live in societies in which we are given a version of reality that corresponds to the cultural biases, prerogatives and myths dominant in a particular place and time.

ipate the earthquake and mitigate its damage, which always falls disproportionately on the poorest, whose dwellings are inadequate, whose access to assistance is minimal, whose suffering is inevitable and, ultimately, irrelevant to how most of us understand reality and our world. So, seeing the reality of the earthquakes more fully means seeing their devastating consequences not just as products of nature alone, but also of injustice. As adult Christians, we need to help each other (especially the students, the ministers-in-training, the youth, the leaders among us) to see current realities more broadly, to be committed to seeking out perspectives different from the mainstream ones we are handed and voices who can tell us much more of their story than we are likely to hear otherwise. In conscience, can we justify "not knowing," "not realizing" and thus "not speaking?" Can we be mature Christians in this society without knowing, realizing and speaking?

- Failure to allow others to journey with us in a way that allows us to receive their support, and to hear their challenges, which help us confront our own blind spots and limitations. Moving into Christian maturity needs to be grounded in the relational dimension. When we resist that dimension, actively or passively, and believe that we can direct ourselves and be effective adult Christians without relationships or accountability, we move away from healthy maturity and diminish the possibility of being compelling witnesses and agents of transformation in our world. Of course, for some individuals, painful personal histories of interpersonal trauma make it difficult to open themselves to close relationships. In those situations, it is

important to seek healing, if there is a genuine desire to grow fully into Christian maturity.

CONCLUSIONS/INVITATIONS

Having identified some basic characteristics of Christian maturity, we must recognize the fact that our current Christian reality, particularly the reality of our Catholic Church, is an imperfect one, which carries considerable structural resistance regarding growth into genuine maturity and adulthood. It is important for us to be aware of this resistance and of its impact on our own efforts to become mature Christians. How are we affected when we see the current institutional structures of the church keep so many people not in roles given to mature adults, with whom to engage in mutually respectful dialogue and honest, open collaboration, but in roles more typical of children, who need to be told what to do, how to do it and when to do it? What does it mean for us to strive to grow into Christian maturity in an institution that is at best ambivalent about receiving our mature adult contributions, and at worst afraid and rejecting of such contributions? These are not easy questions to ask, and there are no easy answers. Still, we need to be asking them and striving to find some answers, in order not to surrender our call to service and to helping our whole church move toward growth.

The recent sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. Catholic Church powerfully illustrates the consequences of some important failures in Christian maturity. Several failures stand out. First, the failure, especially on the part of the leadership, to act transparently in its handling of the crisis. Second, the failure of allowing fear to guide numerous instances of decision-making by church officials when a commitment to "seeing clearly" and to building reconciliation would have transformed the situations and allowed healing to occur. Third, and of particularly grave concern, the ongoing failure in the institution to address sexuality in the church in a constructive, realistic and transparent way. As a clinician who works on a daily basis with the suffering continually experienced in the lives of both ministers and faithful because of this failure, I see the huge cost to the church of not engaging in the candid dialogue necessary to form mature celibates and to support all men and women struggling to cope with the most painful sexual challenges of our day. I can only underscore the urgent need for respectful dialogue at

all levels, for openness and transparency, and for a clear vision of reality regarding sexuality in the church. This type of mature approach to sexuality will provide the best (maybe the only) insurance against continued abuses and suffering. As we have seen only too well, a culture of secrecy and denial inevitably results in more abuse and more suffering.

In summary, Christian maturity asks us to take up the difficult challenge of claiming our Christian adulthood and the attendant responsibility to keep our eyes open, to raise our voices and to take stands for the sake of the Gospel, as well as untiringly to encourage dialogue with the goal of building a reconciled and truly mature Christian community. I would like to conclude by remembering Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN, recently martyred in Brazil as a result of decades of untiring work on behalf of landless peasants there. In the words of one of her sisters, Sister Dorothy's life and death leave us with a legacy and with a charge: "to live as she did, witnessing to the truth that the needs and rights of the poor take priority over the wants of the non-poor, that love demands untiring work for justice, and that justice finds its inner fullness only in love." Here is Christian maturity lived out to its logical conclusion.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Recovering the Value of Guilt

Steven B. Bennett, Ph.D.



The following article is based on a talk given at the First Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium held at Regis University in Denver, CO, June 3-4, 2005. – The Editor.

*Mankind's moral sense is not a strong beacon of light, radiating outward to illuminate in sharp outline all that it touches. It is, rather, a small candle flame, casting vague and multiple shadows, flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology. But brought close to the heart and cupped in one's hands, it dispels the darkness and warms the soul. — James O. Wilson, *The Moral Sense**

As I write this and as you read this, we all share a common ailment. We have a considerable amount of unfinished business that haunts us and, if asked to name it, we would likely describe it as a vague, and for some, not so vague, sense of guilt.

Let me see if I can evoke it. Do you have a letter that needs to be written to a friend? Have you been keeping in touch with your aging parents enough? How is your credit card debt going? Are you maintaining a quality relationship with your child? And how faithful have you been in your relationship with your partner? Betrayed any confidences? Do you wrestle with the powerfully addictive forces provoked by our commercial world...food, money, television,

For all its omnipresence, guilt has the ability to conceal itself from us.

Internet pornography? Are you in service to the less privileged? Are you acting to protect the environment? That's more than enough. Each of us has our own Greek Chorus, and it can irritate like a persistent rash or fly at us like the Furies from Hades.

Guilt is a difficult phenomenon to address because there is probably no human experience that is at one moment so pervasive and ubiquitous, while at the same time so difficult to hold onto, listen to and understand. For all its omnipresence, guilt has the ability to conceal itself from us. We are more comfortable acknowledging the presence of sin than we are describing the more intimate stirring of guilt that informs us that we are standing at the border or have unwittingly crossed the border of our own values into our dark, instinctual depths. We may use various words for the depth of these dangerous landscapes, but we know that Pride, Greed, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Sloth and Envy are ever-present trapdoors that can open and invite us in. I say we know that these sins are close by; however, the truth is that this way of characterizing and imagining our experience and moral development has been on the wane. C. G. Jung in 1916 stated what would become more and more obvious throughout the century.

*To the degree that the modern mind is passionately concerned with anything and everything rather than religion, religion and its prime object — original sin — have mostly vanished into the unconscious. That is why, today, nobody believes in either. People accuse psychology of dealing in squalid fantasies, and yet even a cursory glance at ancient religions and the history of morals should be sufficient to convince them of the demons hidden in the human soul (Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 72).*

Certainly one of the most profound reasons that guilt is so pervasive yet so misunderstood is that the

landscapes of sin, upon which guilt is meant to be the soul's instrument of orientation and direction, have lost many of their boundary markers and road signs. The compass of our guilt flies around erratically, lost and tired in its inability to discriminate its proper path, much less its way home. In any event, we have to deal with our guilt as it presents itself today in 2005; ubiquitous, often remote, occasionally oppressive, always mysterious.

INDIVIDUAL MYSTERY OF GUILT

Although we are accustomed to "doing" something about guilt that will move us on to the grace of forgiveness, I am convinced, and it has been my experience, that in our hasty desire to be released from the confusion and the humid oppressiveness of guilt into the arms of forgiveness we do ourselves a disservice. When forgiveness is given without harvesting the work that guilt calls us to do, we will not find ourselves ripening into maturity. So, although there is much to be said about the saving grace of forgiveness, I will be attempting to remain awhile where I think it is more difficult for us to dwell, where most of us find ourselves, swimming in the cultural and the individual mystery of guilt, still looking for buried treasure. To construct some markers, I will discuss what I sense to be something of the phenomenology of guilt — as Authentic Guilt — and then turn to a discussion of how the spiritual depth of guilt has become, and continues to be, obscured by contemporary life or — Guilt as Anxiety.

AUTHENTIC GUILT

Let me return to the density of life. When I was fourteen, growing up in a small town in the Midwest of the United States, I was part of a pack of young boys who would spend our weekend evenings wandering the streets. What began as a way of passing the time eventually evolved into adventures in mischief making — papering houses, trespassing into public and backyard swimming pools, rearranging "for sale" signs and other forms of unruliness that only seem entertaining to rebellious adolescents.

Well, our collective imaginations got darker and more wayward with time, and it wasn't long before one of our pranks drew the attention of the police. We were all huddled, hidden in a garage, when the police walked in and grabbed one of my friends. The rest of

us bolted to escape, never looking back. None of us ever returned to admit complicity, nor did we talk about it again. That was the day I learned the meaning of a “scapegoat.” Perhaps more curiously, that night I began a series of dreams that, in their repetition, have been every bit as vivid as the actual night of mischief. In these dreams I am plagued by an atmosphere of guilt. In this mood, I am running by neighborhood houses, feeling myself stranded, outside in the cold as I stare, transfixed by the glow of light that shines out of the windows. I merely can watch from a distance, a mute voyeur.

From this description and these images we can sense something of the core drama of guilt. As a young adolescent on the verge of gaining some independence and separation from my family, guilt appeared as a painful awareness that in wandering off from the norms of my family and community, I was wandering into something of a “no-man’s land.” I was curiously in the middle of the lives of others, in the neighborhood, yet on the outside of life, peering in. I might just have been experimenting with the familiar standards of my family and conventional existence, but these activities were leading me to a more precarious, future awareness that in breaking with the moral code of the community and the values of family life, I had little or no understanding of where I was going or where I might find my moorings.

Guilt belongs to our experiences of deviation, to the sense of being off, failing, being unable to relate or connect, recognizing a separation and an alienation from God, the community and oneself. This image of being “outside” the home, homeless, has a resonance with our fundamental, existential understanding of guilt as depicted in the Fall from the Garden of Eden. We all have known adolescence as a time of guilt, errancy and exposure, as a time of leaving or betraying the familiar, not knowing why we did what we did, only to find ourselves now alone, faced with the echoing silence of our actions.

HEARING THE “CALL” OF GUILT

Martin Heidegger, the twentieth century thinker, informs us that this primary experience of guilt, this separation from our everyday ways of being in the world with others, is the necessary condition for the possibility of hearing the “call” of guilt. Contrary to our everyday attitudes toward the life of feelings, which

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often recommend that we medicate or rationalize our “bad” moods away, we forget that feeling, too, is an organ of the soul and that feeling is at the heart of the recognition and the development of our “values.”

So, initially, the call within the mood of guilt is a call to remain within that uncanny, anguished space just outside of Eden or wandering outside the conventional windows of our neighbors. Guilt, although it can arise from an offense or an avoidance of responsibility, breaks us out of our collective sleep and calls us forth to remember what we have forgotten in this collectivity, that we are on our own, that we are thrown back upon ourselves in forging our own soul and spirit. However, being reminded of our own responsibility in this way, the landscape of guilt also presents us with a more shocking reality — that this ability to know ourselves is missing and unavailable.

In a very intimate way, we face the painful side of innocence, that sense of deficiency, a not yet-ness that might as well be a nothingness. We tend to identify guilt with this moment of sinking into the abyss, acutely aware that we do not have the ability to respond, that we cannot take the responsibility for knowing or doing something that escapes our understanding, particularly in the face of powerful desire and temptation. In this condition, we are vulnerable to the seductive power of sexual desire and the strong appetites for power and possession.

The boundaries between these energies and ourselves blur. We listen in, feel their warmth and know that we have identified with and been claimed by their charm before. We become ever more aware of our previous failures, deficiencies and our longing for that which is not-yet. We stand like Faust before Mephistopheles, knowing in our heart that we are no

Our voice of conscience is initially a response to the call hidden within the difficult pain and ambivalence of guilt.

match for what is to come. In *Winter, Friendship and Guilt*, philosopher Michael Gelven confirms this reality: “to be able to be guilty means to see one’s own existence as that at which one can fail or be inadequate, and that this failure is one’s own.”

GUILT — THE CALL OUT TO ONE’S SELF

However, guilt’s initial landscape of inadequacy and nothingness not only calls us back to the anxiety of our solitude, but it also reintroduces us to the vastness and the interiority of that solitude. In this way, guilt has the special function of being the call out to one’s self, raising the question of one’s *willingness to be*, which initiates the *birth of the conscience*. In guilt, we want to have a conscience. And, to our amazement, out of the abyss of our deficiency, we hear its voice.

We are accustomed to thinking that our conscience arises out of our incorporation of the great religious laws or our fidelity to biblical scripture; however, that actually has it backwards. Our voice of conscience is initially a response to the call hidden within the difficult pain and ambivalence of guilt. The anguished call of the mood sounds something like, “Why did I do that? Who am I that I did that? How did I get here? What should I do?” These are all questions that arise out of the existential moments of guilt that we experience daily and that are echoes of the question that Saint Paul ponders when he confesses, “For the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19).

The voice of conscience answers the appeal of guilt and summons our attention back to the interior life of solitude. The appeal is to the self lost in a public world; the summons, to be one’s own self by assuming responsibility for one’s acts as one’s own. The summons of conscience, the “hearing” of the voice that makes no

sound, calls us away from where we are, whether it be out of a boring party, surfing the Internet or in the grip of a consuming desire, and reminds us that we are in conversation with something other than the immediate, material world. And if it is the whisper of a conversation, what then is said? We might say that conscience calls us forth into the innermost possibilities of our being, but does not tell us what these possibilities are. The summons merely makes it clear that there is an alternative to being lost in the public world and calls us to fulfill our own potentiality for being a self.

Although our immediate arousal to conscience may not tell us “anything,” it reacquaints us to the depth of *silence* from which we will need to build the patience and the resoluteness to open ourselves and our souls to the drama initiated by guilt. Guilt has reminded us that we are never free of the dark shadows of evil, that our tapestry, both personally and collectively, is woven together with threads of instinct, egotism, cowardice and violence. However, in remaining faithful to this guilt, we find ourselves trusting in a voice surrounded by enough silence to initiate a dialogue with those same shadowy forces. This is a perilous task. Cultivating the silence that will allow us to hold and see through the complexity and the suffering of our souls is not something easily acquired in our feverishly productive lives.

THE SPIRIT’S DANCE WITH GUILT/SUFFERING

From this perspective, one can gain a new appreciation for the value of the rituals of prayer, confession, spiritual direction and some forms of psychotherapy. These places imitate the structure of the spirit’s dance with guilt and suffering and the pregnancy of silence that surrounds these experiences. These rituals turn us back upon ourselves to face that interior space, where language trails off into silence and the invisible shapes of how we are connected to ourselves and the world step out of the shadows. We forget these rituals and structures at our own peril, for as we will discuss later, it is the decline of such silent disciplines and what they allow us to practice that correlates with the rise of anxiety and inauthentic guilt.

Earlier, I suggested that the special function of guilt is that it calls out to one’s self, raising the question of one’s *willingness to be*, which initiates the birth of the conscience. It is critical to our understanding of guilt to acknowledge the role of the “will” in this expe-

rience. The subtle “will” forces that one comes to develop in this silent process are distinctively *interior*. Although these forces do not necessarily direct our actions, this interior will is of a uniquely *spiritual* nature. The will prepares us for our dark wrestling match with the natural and the chthonic, or underworld, forces of good and evil, light and dark.

My earlier adolescent dream of running in the neighborhood after being caught by the police is a good example of the appearance and the working of this interior, spiritual will. In the dream, I am repeatedly presented with the value-laden drama and emotional movement that was being lived through in my daytime predicament. In dreams we are present to the movement of the subterranean forces of Wrath, Envy, Lust or Greed, but we also are aware of our *own* movement. One may find oneself going to summer camp with serial killer Charles Manson or going to dinner and drinks with Zena, the Warrior Princess. But we are there, silently, listening to, dancing with or screaming at “these voices that make no sound,” gaining a sense of our own will forces in relationship to and in contrast to these demonic and angelic forces.

GAINING COURAGE AND RESOLUTENESS

In this way, the will’s reflection of the movement of guilt, feeling and desire offers us the possibility of gaining the courage and the resoluteness to differentiate our emotional life by dragging us back to the battle-ground where our values are threatened, betrayed, inspired and reconstructed. Dreams do this nightly and, in doing so, try to teach us the silent language of the interior will, the will that is necessary eventually to hear the more encouraging, spiritual direction of the conscience.

From this discussion of the interior will we may be able to get a different sense of what it means to say, “Dear God, Thy will, not mine, be done.” This does not suggest that one should avoid developing one’s will or immediately and totally surrender that will to God. The will is that spiritual organ through which one slowly and painstakingly learns to discern and discriminate the cacophonous voices of desire and temptation, such that it can hear the conscience and likewise discern the will of God. In this discernment one finds oneself moving and being moved by the ever greater expansiveness of the soul and its figures, an increase in psychological space in which one realizes that all these forces are

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parts of the wholeness that calls one on and fosters the maturation of the self and the spirit.

GUILT AS ANXIETY

In our culture, we not only are losing the trail of guilt that would lead us to a more mature conscience, but we also often find ourselves confounded, wondering what trail we are on. We hear the word guilt being spoken of constantly. “I feel guilty that I said that,” “I feel guilty for not remembering her name,” or, “I feel guilty for getting angry.” What is curious is that we are suspiciously aware that this type of guilt does not lead to the awakening of the conscience. These sentiments possibly may have deeper roots, but contrary to the moral and imaginative effort summoned by genuine guilt, these experiences are not accompanied by a sense of interiority and dialogue.

Rather than guilt, these experiences betray the “imageless” presentation of anxiety. As we will discuss, if the trail of guilt has become too difficult to find and grown over for lack of use, it is in large part because guilt has become confounded with the path of anxiety, which has grown to the proportions of a highway, dotted with service stations of Prozac. This highway is offered to all of us who slip further and further into the speed, the consumerism and the convenience of being modern secular materialists. In order to see this decline in the experience of guilt, we will need to venture into how this has become the Age of Anxiety.

When Jung states that “sin has mostly vanished into the unconscious,” he is pointing toward the same phenomenon, that the meaningful movement of our experience of guilt has dropped below our level of awareness. This is a tricky thing to say and to entertain because in a way, the experience of sin and guilt always

So, the profile of our modern ego is that it must pursue security, control and dominance in the outer, material world.

is hovering around the edges of our awareness and challenging our capacity to remain conscious of it. It is the nature of these dark forces to mix in with our best qualities. Sloth can hide under the fact that one is an accepting, laid-back kind of guy, or greed can be the main impulse behind my ideologies of economic progress. As cultural historian Denis de Rougemont explores in his critique of the influences of democracy, *The Devil's Share*, the devils are working best when they have convinced us that they do not really exist.

However, beyond the tricky inevitability of sin, Jung is referring to something else. He is asking us to recognize that we have, in fact, aided the devil by placing another layer of deception upon the shoulders of modern human beings that collectively has made it more difficult for us to recognize and work through our own guilt. We perhaps can see this if we look at the 100-year-old field of psychotherapy itself. At the beginning of the twentieth century, as the conscience of sin was giving way to the conscience of progress, and guilt was becoming more difficult to see and work through, modern men and women were leaving the confessional to line up at the offices of psychiatrists and psychotherapists.

MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

What provoked this exodus? What was it that Freud and his millions of imitators were responding to that could not be held in the conversation between priest and parishioner? In *About Looking*, writer and artist John Berger gives us a clue: "the first secularization of the capitalist world during the nineteenth century elided (suppressed) the judgment of God into the judgment of History in the name of Progress. Democracy and Science became the agents of such a judgment." What Berger is suggesting is that since the fourteenth century,

since the birth of Enlightenment science and its attendant technologies, modern consciousness has identified itself with a calculative rationality which privileged rational thinking to such an extent that it marginalized all other faculties of desire, feeling and willing to the category of being "irrational."

The inherent secularization that arises out of scientific thinking is grounded in the irreverent assumption that the human soul is best guided by rationality. As we have witnessed over the last three centuries, such rationality, in its calculating, causal methods, leads to a materialism of the body, soul and world. What Berger is referring to in stating that "the secularization...of the nineteenth century suppressed the judgment of God into the judgment of History" is that as the more sacred and religious narrative fabric of our culture gave way to the economic and technological worldview, our experience of Time was radically altered. To be judged by History rather than by God means to be trapped in a tick-tock world of linear time in which biologically, socially and psychologically, I am what I have been in literal time. There is no more sacred time, there is no way the inner or mythic voices speak, just History.

Having said this, we now can see that the *new modern conscience* that Freud proposes, the Super-ego, which is the representation of all the critical and brutal moral, social and religious authorities that one has encountered, is merely the voice of History. This modern drama of guilt and conscience involves facing the voices of historical authority and does not guide the spirit toward an expansive sense of the way eternity calls to us. The human spirit that is bound and damned in historical time is what is called *the ego*. Freud's ego (and our own technological ego) is an anxious traumaphile (lover of trauma) whose time-bound rationality creates a materialistic world wherein its interior life is so meager and its external life so chaotically threatening that it must construct "ego defenses" to survive.

MEDICATION, RATIONALIZATION AND DENIAL

So, the profile of our modern ego is that it must pursue security, control and dominance in the outer, material world. And the landscape that these extroverted, imagination-free (imageless) endeavors fashion is the world of Anxiety. Thus, psychotherapy is often more about learning to "cope" and the narcissism of maintaining a strong ego in the face of this anxiety

than about the maturity of the soul and the spirit.

I have gone to the trouble of sketching out this profile because we now can get a better feel for how the rich spiritual heritage of guilt has been so undermined as to have become a “bad” feeling that we try to medicate, rationalize or deny as soon as possible. What is initially notable is that contrary to the experience of authentic guilt in which one cultivates the spiritual, *interior experience of the will* in struggling with the silent forces and voices of the underworld, the modern ego is composed of an *externalized image of the will* that works upon the world to establish “security, control and dominance.”

We often hear that we should develop more “willpower,” but as any member of Alcoholics Anonymous will tell you, it is not willpower that assists one in dealing with a strong addiction, but rather an interior will that in its silent, secret knowledge of the movement of deep passion, can deliver us from evil by delivering us over to something beyond ourselves.

Without the development of both dimensions of the will, internal and external, the call of guilt does not create enough inner, psychological space to face and differentiate the mood. This inner space, as we mentioned earlier, is the characteristic *silence* that precedes and surrounds a vigorous conscience. This silence is the ground for the appearance and the maturation of the spirit and, if it is too frail and gives way to distraction, it will be unable to support the imagination necessary to discriminate feeling and desire.

In the absence of the will’s activity, no shapes and voices come to give conscience’s silence the depth and the flexibility that provoke its wisdom and conversation. Rather, our awareness is thrown out into the world of anxiety with little relationship to the stirrings of the soul.

I have described this contemporary drift away from authentic guilt toward a more impaired experience of sin and guilt-as-anxiety because as teachers, counselors and therapists, we are participants and witnesses to an unfortunate shift, helping people to cope rather than transform. As more men and women describe their suffering from guilt as experiences that fail to touch conscience, we will need to be aware of how to recover the values of guilt. If we lose our ability to be faithful to the religious complexity and the depth of guilt, our feeling life will become more indistinguishable, and guilt will continue to be experienced and interpreted by our willful egos as the oblivious movement of Anxiety.

As more men and women describe their suffering from guilt as experiences that fail to touch conscience, we will need to be aware of how to recover the values of guilt.

In the secularization of the psyche, Anxiety is the Mother of all modern disorders, and under the din of our compulsive entertainment and consumption, she promises to break the Spirit.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Faithful Servant, Mature Christian

Margaret Cessna, H.M.



“Let’s have a cozy, darlin’,” she would say, and then we would have a bit of tea and a bunch of conversation. In her lilting brogue she would remind me that life was lovely and aren’t we lucky to have this time together? She was a master at “letting it go” because negative responses would interfere with the lovely memories that we were making.

She came into this world as Margaret O’Brien in County Clare, Ireland. She left this world ninety-three years later as Sister Vincent de Paul O’Brien in Villa Maria, Pennsylvania.

Vincent was my friend, and if I were pope, I would “*sancto subito*” Saint Vincent de Paul II.

She left her beloved Ireland as a young girl to find work as a domestic in New York in order to send money home. Having cousins in Cleveland she joined them for a while and then entered the Sisters of the Humility of Mary in 1929 and faithfully served for seventy years.

Having very little formal education, she did not pursue studies once she made her vows. She became dorm mother at the community boarding school and served in that capacity for thirty years. She loved the young people and was friend, counselor and, yes, confessor to multitudes of students, parents and friends who kept in touch with her years after their school days. No one knows how many and can only guess based on the volume of her visits, phone calls and mail.

She became Executive Housekeeper at the motherhouse when she left the school. Titles were not important to her. She just mopped and cleaned and dusted and worked with the hired help for twenty-two years.

As a student of the gospels she lived her life simply, prayerfully and generously. Her influence was both gentle and powerful. She exuded gratitude for all of the blessings in her life and taught many of us to do the same. To sip a cup with her and to listen to her would make one think that abundant blessings were the only things worth our attention. She was calm and soothing, this daughter of Ireland. Her faith in Jesus and her family and friends always took center stage.

She died on December 21, and her funeral was the day before Christmas Eve. The homilist remarked to the standing room only congregation that her death was such a gift to us. Who else could ever have convinced us to take a day out of shopping and hurried last-minute preparations for Christmas? A day to slow down and remember the greatness of this God who was at the center of Vincent's life and to remember the enduring gift that her life was to all of us.

"You'll get my shillelagh when I am gone, Peg," she promised. And her walking stick stands to this day in

the corner by my front door and serves as a reminder to live in the present moment, to laugh at anger, to make happy memories. And, most of all, to know that simplicity and humility are the true road to holiness.

She taught many of us those lessons. I miss hearing her brogue, learning her lessons, sipping her tea. But I don't miss the essence of her because she is still here in all that she shared and all that she taught.

Saint Vincent de Paul II. She wouldn't like it. But the hearts that she touched would applaud and join in a hymn of praise to her. To get a seat, you would have to arrive very early.



Sister Margaret Cessna, H.M., a sister of the Humility of Mary, is a writer from Cleveland, Ohio

LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor:

Thanks to a Jesuit friend in Chicago, I have been receiving HUMAN DEVELOPMENT for many years and passing issues on to others here in Delhi, India. We are grateful for the quality of HD's contents and its easy-to-read language. I have just received your spring 2005 issue and like it. One remark about the article, "Sexual Addiction—Helped by Surrender to God." The article is very honest and insightful; one statement, however, gives me pause. I refer to the author's remark about *the largely unhelpful advice of the pre-Vatican II priest to 'pray to Mary.'* Adding a joke about the falling young man praying his "Hail Mary" before he hits the ground, he leaves the topic of Mary and moves on to proposing help for sexual addicts. As long as he introduces the topic of Mary, my problem is not so much what is said as what is left unsaid. I explain. The author, let's call him Anon, is here clearly referring to confessors who offer simplistic formulas to penitents, some of whom are suffering from powerfully addictive temptations. Good point. Anon states that *if compulsive mental lust constitutes the root problem for the sex addict, then the solution involves recognizing the condition and surrendering to God* [emphasis added]. Here's my point: Anon says nothing that would exclude the fact that Mary's mediation is centrally important to the addict's successful surrender to God. The experience of Catholic Christian tradition witnesses to this, that in the human family's pilgrimage towards wholeness and holiness, Mary's mediation is essentially important. Ignatius Loyola comes to mind. He attests that Mary's mediation won him a core-deliverance so that *his spirit was rid of all the images that had been painted on it*. This was accompanied, he states, by a grace-filled loathing for his whole past life "especially for the things of the flesh" (*Autobiography* 10).

Sincerely,
Reverend E.J. Daly, S.J., Delhi, India

Book Review

Christ in a Grain of Sand, by Neil Vaney. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria, 2004. 192 pages. \$14.95.

This is a startling book. Rooted in a professional understanding of the dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises*, it soars into the galactic expanses of our universe, and yet it also touches into the tiniest particles that constitute that reality. *Christ in a Grain of Sand* reminds me of a quote that is often referred to as Ignatius of Loyola's epitaph: "to suggest no restriction from anything, however great, and yet to be contained in the tiniest of things — that is divine."

I just finished reading an article (*America*, October 18, 2004, p. 16) in which the author was describing some of what the Hubble Telescope found while peering more deeply into space than humans have ever before looked. He claims that "from a human point of view the enormity of these dimensions of time and space is bewildering. Five hundred years ago we postured ourselves at the center of the universe; now we cling precariously to a remote spec of cosmic dust. Our life-dominant sun is one mediocre star among the myriad that.... Outnumber the grains of sand on all the beaches of the world." This comment in an article entitled, "The Deep Mystery of God," could serve as a fitting introduction to Neil Vaney's startling and inspiring book.

Almost 500 hundred years ago, while alive at a time which postured humans at the center of the universe, Ignatius withstood the Renaissance's excessively self-centered humanistic focus. From a very different angle, his *Exercises* promise a God-centered, humanistic life of faithful daily intimacy with the Risen Jesus. Father Vaney updates this astronomical context in a breathlessly awesome fashion without sacrificing any appreciation of the fundamental dynamics of the *Exercises* as Ignatius articulated them from his own experience.

The author's own creative, imaginative words used to close his treatment of the whole *Exercises* catch both the balance of geological forces that he describes and the attractive flavor of his written text. Though a bit lengthy, I quote the whole passage.

A Friend of God was pondering over the puniness of human beings compared to the immense sweep of this universe, asking how they could be of significance in the vast panoply of creation. It was then that God opened his mind to the entire creation, his vision passing from galaxy to galaxy, an endless sea of exploding suns, a boundless rippling of dark and mysterious seething matter, of stars coming to birth, of pressures and temperatures and immense gravity beyond all human conception. Yet every speck and least mite of this boundless array was fully present to the mind of God, loving and sustaining each tiniest particle. Then it came to him that he too could encompass all this wonder because he too was made in the image of God, he could share the mind of God. In a flash he passed from one universe to another. He was rooted in this earth, one of six billion, a dust mite on this speck of terrestrial matter. Yet all this vision was encompassed in his brain in his fragile skull. In wonder his cry welled up. "O God, how exquisite you are." In silence, a tiny voice replied, "You are exquisite."

Just as is true of the book of the *Exercises*, so Vaney's text invites more than a straight-through reading. The passage just quoted is a good example of the book's luring the reader into an experience, an awesome experience of the exciting discovery of oneself as a friend of God so exquisitely loved in the vast panorama of our universe as to find a beloved Christ in absolutely everything, even every grain of sand.

The structure of the book is essential to the experience promised. An introductory chapter does two things. It introduces the elements that give form to each day's prayer, including things like a grace desired, the Ignatian focus, an ideological reflection and a scriptural reflection with supplementary texts. These daily forms give contemporary life and blood flow to the original Ignatian schema in the *Exercises*. It also gives a brief description of the nine themes that constitute the experience of the full development of the *Exercises*.

In the four following chapters he treats each of the Weeks of the *Exercises*. In each of those chapters, his introduction gives an insightful overview of the dynam-

ics of the particular Week to be experienced. His treatment of the Paschal Mystery in the Third and Fourth Weeks is especially good, inviting the readers ("retreatants" better describes the readers' involvement with the text) not to get stuck in their own experience but to be with Jesus in his experience. Here, also, insights from nature, ecology and astronomy heighten the appreciation of the dynamic of the dying into new life that is revealed in Jesus.

The whole experience of the Four Weeks is fleshed out in thirty days. The form of each day is laid out according to the elements described in the Introduction. By the end of the experience these elements have coalesced into a way of living with aspects of personal sensitivity that now focus the person — heart, soul and imagination — for finding God's Love everywhere, often in quite unlikely, surprising situations.

Besides the ecological and astrological perspective, a great scriptural richness pervades the whole book. After sensing the influence of Scripture scholar N. T. Wright's two massive volumes on *Jesus and the Victory of God* and *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, I was cheered to find Vaney's explicit mention of his name. One slight difficulty struck me in the treatment of the Third Week. Jesus' experience of being forsaken on the cross might be described more carefully to preserve the full Trinitarian dimension. Jesus surely goes through a

real emotional experience of apparently being forsaken by his Father, while more deeply in faith beyond his feeling, he believes in that dear Father's Love that has led him all through his life and suffering, and now continues consolingly present in his deepest faith.

This volume stretches our imagination and quickens the best of our hearts in the discovery of a faithful Love, the discovery of God in the personal presence of the Risen Jesus in absolutely everything everywhere. But it always takes profound, lively faith to sense love and hope in our world where often only dying and discouragement seem to prevail. Early in his introduction Father Vaney claims that "the reflections I propose to the reader try to highlight the ecological and natural values that underlie each stage of the journey (of the *Exercises*). They attempt to illustrate how much a multileveled reading of the text illuminates and opens up the traditional reading to a much wider experience or understanding and conversion." Many directors and retreatants of the *Exercises* will be grateful to Neil Vaney for opening up the text to these new, exciting, breathtaking perspectives. This reviewer acknowledges in thanksgiving the grand success of his undertaking. And I surmise that little Basque pilgrim also smiles with a knowing look of gratitude.

— Rev. George A. Aschenbrenner, S.J.

Please visit our website (www.regis.edu/hd) for details on the Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium on "Spirituality and Healthy Living" at Regis University in Denver, CO.

Confessing to Road Rage

Recently, a group of us who meet at the Arabica, a local coffee shop, every Saturday morning happened to bring up the subject of road rage. Dr. Joseph Foley, a regular at these meetings and a great student not only of medicine but also of literature and theology, mentioned that road rage is not a new phenomenon. He pointed out that a road rage scene occurs in *Oedipus the King*, a play written by Sophocles in 425 B.C. Here's how Sophocles describes the scene:

*There were three highways
Coming together at a place I passed;
And there a herald came towards me, and a chariot
Drawn by horses, with a man such as you describe
Seated in it. The groom leading the horses
Forced me off the road at his lord's command;
But as this charioteer lurched over towards me
I struck him in my rage. The old man saw me
And brought his double goad down upon my head
As I came abreast.
He was paid back, and more!
Swinging my club in this right hand I knocked him
Out of his cart, and he rolled on the ground.
I killed him.
I killed them all.*

Had there been a newspaper account of this violent event, the banner headline might have read, "Road Rage Kills King Laius and Bodyguards. Murderer Sought." You know the rest of the story, so I will not recap it for you here.

But I will tell you a story of how road rage took over my better judgment. About ten years ago I was driving east with my wife Anita on Clifton Boulevard, a six-lane highway in Lakewood, Ohio, where we live. It was mid-morning, so the traffic was rather light. I was driving in the middle lane and observing the speed limit, which is rigidly enforced in our city. Suddenly, I was distracted by what I saw in the rear view mirror — a young, long-haired blond woman driving about two feet behind me. I mentioned this to Anita, who looked around and saw the woman putting on her makeup. I felt a sense of anger because I still was suffering the

effects of a rear-end collision a few years earlier, which was caused by another young, long-haired blond woman who was putting on her makeup instead of watching the traffic in front of her.

Anita, who knows that my quiet temperament does not suffer fools gladly, suggested that I get off Clifton and onto Lake Avenue, which runs parallel to Clifton. Good advice. So at the first side street I turned left and got on Lake. All was well until I looked in the rear view mirror and noticed the same woman driving a couple of feet behind our car.

I exploded with rage and with some choice words of profanity. As we approached Lakewood Park, the light changed to red, so I knew what I was going to do.

So did Anita, who said, "George, please don't get out of the car." But I did and tapped on the window of "Blondie," who now was looking in the mirror and combing her hair. She was startled and looked frightened. I yelled at her, "Stop tailgating us!" I then went back to our car. The light changed to green, and I continued driving. At the next side street, Blondie turned and went back to Clifton. Mission accomplished. Anita, however, was quietly seething, not at Blondie, but at me.

That afternoon I had class at the college. I began by telling my students about my road rage and how I shouted at that tailgating "air head." I could tell that many in the class could identify with my rage and my actions. A forty-year-old male student said, "Dr. Eppley, with all due respect, I would like to say that what you did was very foolish." A few in the class nodded their heads in agreement.

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Because a lot of women carry small handguns next to them when they are driving. She could have thought you were going to rob her or attack her. She could have shot and killed you. She could have told a jury that she panicked and shot in self-defense. You could have been paralyzed — or dead."

I don't know what I taught those students that afternoon. But I never forgot the lesson that one student taught me about the folly of road rage.

— George Eppley, Ph.D.